

ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE



Photo by Schmidt

Spencer.

To-day

ALL THE DAYS OF
MY LIFE 12
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by
S. P. B. MAIS

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LONDON

WITH DEEP LOVE
TO
THE FAITHFUL FIVE
/
MY FATHER AND MOTHER,
JILL, IMOGEN AND LALAGE
WHO BY THEIR OWN HAPPINESS AND LAUGHTER
HAVE MADE
ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE
HAPPY AND FULL OF LAUGHTER

Made and Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
1937

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Chapter I

I DINE WITH THE BACON SOCIETY, 1937

“**W**HAT a very happy sort of person you seem to be.”

I looked at my partner with surprise. He returned my look with even greater deliberation. Then with judicial care he added :

“I think I may safely say that you are the happiest man I ever met. Who are you ?”

The occasion was the annual dinner of the Bacon Society, which exists not to praise gammon, but to bury Shakespeare. As I was the guest of honour I felt slightly irritated by the question. I drew out of my pocket two precious envelopes that I always carry about with me for identification purposes. As I handed the first one to my neighbour I said : “These were both delivered by the same mail to the hotel where I was staying in New York.” I pointed to the address. It read :

Mr. Mais,
America.

“As at that time,” I continued, “a certain Robert Mais, Public Enemy Number One, had just been arrested for kidnapping, holding up to ransom and ultimately murdering a Boston millionaire, I felt it a high compliment that the American post office should have delivered it to me. Now take a look at this other one.”

I handed him the second envelope. It read :

S. P. B. Mais, Esq.,
Christ Church,
Oxford.

In pencil by the side was written so illegibly as to express extreme irritability : “Not known.”

"The second is from my point of view the more accurate," he said. "But neither of these envelopes answers my question. I've never seen the name before. Is it Dutch?"

I shook my head angrily.

"Do I look Dutch?"

He surveyed me critically over the top of his pince-nez.

"You look like a very English farmer or groom. You look as if you lived in the open air."

"I am English. Pure West Country."

"Devonshire?"

"No. Devon."

"A purist. How do you pronounce yourself?"

I told him.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "They would pronounce it with a 'z' in the lazy West. But I still don't know who you are or why you are so happy."

I dived into my pockets for more evidence. I produced a picture post card. On one side of the card was a photograph of Rossall, where I had been for four years a schoolmaster. On the other side was written:

"How on earth you have the infernal cheek to write articles to my daily paper the *Morning Post* when you are being divorced by your wife after many years of married life and have three daughters absolutely beats me. Have you no sense of decency? You ought to hide your head in shame. What does my Rossall contemporary E. B. Osborn on the staff of the *Morning Post* say about you? I'm disgusted."

My neighbour raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"You don't mean to say that you're young enough to take any notice of this sort of thing? How old are you?"

"Fifty-one."

"Leave out the fifty."

I disregarded that and went on:

"And by the same post I had a request from a country parson to reprint these *Morning Post* articles (they were on village cricket) in his Parish Magazine."

"I see. You find life contradictory and full of surprises. Is that why you're happy?"

"Call no man happy until he is drunk," I said.

"You're not drunk, and will you please stop quoting from Doctor Johnson? This is a Bacon dinner. Are you a Baconian?"

"Do I think Bacon was a great writer? Yes. Do I think he wrote Shakespeare's plays? No."

"Then what are you doing in this galley?"

"What am I doing in any galley? I haven't the faintest idea."

"So you do find life just a prodigious jest."

"I shan't know that until I'm dead."

"I do wish you'd stop quoting from eighteenth-century authors. I want your secret, not John Gay's epitaph."

"I have no secret. What do you want to know?"

"Why you are so happy."

"I didn't know I was until you told me so. I've every reason to be happy."

"Why? What do you do?"

"I broadcast."

"That's no reason for happiness. But it explains why I've never heard of you. I don't listen-in. Who does, outside the kitchen?"

He must be, I thought, a judge, or an old-fashioned family solicitor.

"The North of England, lighthouse-keepers, children, most of the disabled, and the unemployed."

"I am, fortunately, not in any of these categories. Do you do anything else?"

"I write."

"Everybody writes. I don't read modern authors. Who does?"

"Modern writers. We take in each other's washing."

"Is that the sum of your activities? I see no explanation of your cheerfulness so far."

"I talk."

"The disease of the age. It's the writer's only platform for publicity. You talk well, of course?"

"Of course."

"Everybody does. Anything else? What do you do with your leisure?"

"I ride in the sun, I walk in the sun, I bathe in the sun, I lie in the sun, I'm a sun-worshipper."

"In England?"

"In Sussex."

"Life is indeed contradictory. A sun-worshipper in Sussex."

"We get two thousand hours of sunshine a year," I said.

The catechism came to an abrupt end owing to the chairman calling on my cross-examiner to propose the toast of the Bacon Society. He was perfectly at ease, and very long-winded. His main contention was that when Pope described Bacon as

"Wiseest, brightest, meanest of mankind,"

what he meant by "meanest" was something very different from what we mean. He adduced so many instances, and he spoke so mellifluously that I soon ceased to listen. He was obviously a judge. He was so sure of himself, so slow of speech, and so completely wrong on every point.

I harked back to his unexpected question. Why was I so happy? I began to tabulate my blessings. I got a quick stabbing mental picture of Jill's honey-coloured head bent over Imogen's cot and Lalage's low little bed. My three hostages to fortune, my "impediments to great enterprises." I was thinking in terms of Bacon even if I wasn't following the flow of panegyric about his hitherto unrecognised admirable qualities. What was it Bacon said about halving sorrows and doubling joys? Perhaps he did write Shakespeare after all. Anyway he must have known something about the human heart to have said that.

I suddenly saw Jill standing on the platform at Shoreham station that very afternoon waving me off after her invariable manner until, like that other Imogen after whom we christened ours, she felt her eyeballs crack. "After

you've gone I always feel completely empty," she had said as we stood uncertainly waiting for the train. "Silly, isn't it? One shouldn't be so dependent on one person." I'm glad she is. I am. What was it Raymond had called her? A girl in a million? A girl in a trillion. What was it the Psalmist said? "Happy is the man that hath his quiverful." Two isn't perhaps quite a quiverful, but I like daughters, few or many. Images of Lalage came crowding into my brain; Lalage racing sturdily over the wide sands at Woolacombe straight and fearlessly into the sea at four years old, Lalage not quite so fearless on the leading rein, Lalage going off to school in thick, dark navy blue coat and Woolworth's red woollen gloves, Lalage singing: "A Little Talk with Jesus" with the Children's Seaside Mission. I heard Imogen's happy gurgling in her summer-house. Yes, emphatically, I am happy in fatherhood.

It is pleasant to have a book-lined study to which I can retire, and under the pretence of work read a new novel or sleep undisturbed, but it is even more pleasant to run out of the study into the day-nursery and see Lalage's tousled head bent low over her roll-top desk, or into the night-nursery before my bath to see her torturing stillness in sleep. I feel an almost irresistible temptation to prod her to make sure that she is still alive.

I was awoken from my reverie by what I took to be the flapping of wings of passing swans. It was the heart-felt applause celebrating the fact that my learned friend had stopped at last. He gulped down some water, wiped his rather florid brow, and repeated the question that all broadcasters ask their long-suffering announcers and all husbands ask their wives.

"Was I all right?" he asked.

"Superb," I replied. No hyperbole will ever disturb the complacency of any after-dinner speaker. He only asks the question to secure corroboration of his own certainty. My friend was no longer interested in my happiness. He took out a befittingly large gold repeater.

"H'm, h'm," he said. "Time's getting on. I hope

the rest of you fellows won't be too long-winded. I have a train to catch."

"You may rely on me," I said. "I have to get back to Sussex."

The chairman was on his feet, the toast-list in his hand.

"It would be impertinent," he began, "to suggest to anyone in this room, or for that matter anywhere in the English-speaking world, that our next speaker needs any introduction. He is known to every one of us."

He paused to pick up a piece of paper on which was apparently written a list of my achievements.

"Mr. Mace's name," he went on, "is a household word. We may not all know him by sight, but we have all heard his wonderful talks on" (he glanced at the paper without success) "on" (he recovered himself with a smile) "on the air." He gave a disarming smile vaguely in my direction. "He may not look quite what we should expect from his voice, a little fatter, a little more rubicund perhaps, but then which of us does? We have all, of course, read his delightful books. I remember with especial delight his *Search of England* which earned for him the proud title of: 'Ambassador of the English Countryside.' ("I thought you said your name was Mais?" whispered my friend. "He thinks I'm H. V. Morton," I said.) Other facts that I have gleaned about him from the pages of *Who's Who* and elsewhere are that he is a Master of Arts of the University of Oxford. ("That's a great distinction," whispered my friend. "How much does it cost?" "Twelve guineas.") A fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. ("Is that more or less than F.R.G.S.?" went on the lawyer. "Two guineas more," I said indignantly.) A Running Blue. ("An athlete and a scholar? Dear, dear.") An ex-Public School master. ("That sounds like the headline in the report of officer's alleged assault.") His pursuits are so varied that one day we read of him as a latter-day Hampden protecting the rights of his villagers to play cricket on the green and the next night leading fourteen hundred London hikers through the darkness to the top of the South Downs to see the moon set, and the sun

I DINE WITH THE BACON SOCIETY, 1937 15
rise.” (“ So that’s why he called you the Ambassador of
the Countryside ? ”)

Eventually I was allowed to make my speech. Luckily
I never remember more than three out of the thirty or so
headings that I prepare, so when I sat down again I had
no need to ask my friend : “ Was I all right ? ” His
watch was in his hand. “ I shall catch my train,” he said.
“ Thank you for a very pleasant evening.”

It is not how you speak but how long that matters.

“ You must dine with me,” I said, “ one night at the
Odd Volumes. Any fourth Tuesday.”

He smiled. “ Between cultivated minds the first
interview is the best.”

“ That’s not Bacon,” I answered.

“ Emerson,” he corrected. “ Why should I dine with
your odd volumes ? ”

“ Because we have to be rude about our guests in
public.”

“ What fun. Is it difficult to become a member ? ”

“ Very. You have to justify your election.”

“ How did you justify yours ? ”

“ I once played cricket for Yorkshire.”

“ You must be very good.”

“ It was raining. I was the only spectator. Lord
Hawke asked me to field as substitute while someone
went in for a sweater.”

“ It sounds improbable.”

“ Most of my achievements sound improbable. Have
you ever met anybody before who has been drawn in
triumph through the streets of Wigan in a coach and
four, and been publicly presented with a pair of children’s
clogs at the end of it ? Have you ever met anybody
before who has been solemnly presented with a full and
uncorked bottle of Bass in full daylight by a perfect
stranger in Whitehall ?

“ Have you met anybody before who was appointed
Examiner for a University in the very subject in which
he had himself twice failed to satisfy the Examiners ?

“ Have you ever met anybody before who in all
innocence has gone up to the present Queen and said :

‘I seem to remember your face. Surely we’ve met somewhere.’?

“Have you ever met anybody before who was News Editor of a great London daily for four years and never once edited the news?”

“Have you ever met anybody before who was offered the title of Wing-Commander in the Royal Air Force before he had even entered an aeroplane?”

“Have you ever met anybody before who was put in charge of a train-load of tourists bound for Czechoslovakia and Poland without ever having been to either country and without a word of French or German?”

“Have you ever met anybody before who has been televised giving a talk on the future of television without even having seen an example of television?”

“Have you ever met anybody before who on the same day that he was mistaken for a newsboy on Windsor platform by the Duke of Connaught was accorded a unanimous vote of confidence by the Manx House of Keys?”

“Have you ever——?”

I was cut short.

“I have never met anyone half so communicative on a first meeting. You ought to write your autobiography. It would save you telling the story of your life to every second stranger.”

“Thank you for the idea. I will.”

Here it is.

Chapter II

I DINE WITH THE SURVIVORS, 1937

“HELLO, young Mais !”

There is no epithet I value more, or deserve less, so far as actual years are concerned, for the men who still hail me by this flattering soubriquet at fifty-one were my contemporaries at the “House,” and in view of the fact that I didn’t go up to Oxford till I was twenty I am at least two years older than most of the men of my year. And yet some of them have sons who have already gone up and gone down again, and a few are even grandfathers.

What gives me such a shock at every fresh reunion is that these companions of my youth look like grandfathers. They are bald, they are grey, they are grizzled, they are corpulent, they have many chins, they look middle-aged, they have become bishops, ministers of the Crown, judges of the High Court, M.F.H.’s, C.M.G.’s. Some have retired on a pension. One is even president of a college. One is Master of the Rolls. Can anything be older than that?

I seem to have scarcely started life, and I feel about twenty-five. And though I am a firm believer in retarded development, there should be development. I wonder if in reality I appear to the rest of my contemporaries as a horrible reminder of their increasing age. Their faces certainly light up with pleasure when I, lying, say: “How do you manage to keep so young-looking?” Perhaps it is as well that we “Survivors” only dine together twice a year.

And yet there are great compensations in spending a few hours with the men of one’s own time. We at any rate speak the same language and share much the same views. We know the value of good food and wine and, at the

Union Club, where we meet, we get an abundance of both. We may look askance at one another at first, but under the influence of a glass of sherry we mellow and have already become reminiscent by the second glass of champagne. "Do you remember the night when . . . ?" Unless our memories play us false we all seem to have heard the chimes at midnight more than once.

We are a small club of thirty-three members. No guests are allowed. The qualifications are: (i) Membership of the "House" between 1902 and 1912, and (ii) Service in the Great War. The majority are Old Wykehamists and at the Bar. We usually sit down about twenty to table, and conversation, apart from reminiscence, runs mainly on hunting, shooting and fishing. Most "House" men of my time had plenty of money and plenty of leisure.

Perhaps that explains why my colleague from Worcester said, when I asked him to which college I should go: "Worcester. Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

We were both on the staff of a preparatory school in Blackheath, and during the two years that I shared his study he had taught me much. How well I remember my first interview with him. I was eighteen, I had just left school, and discovered with a certain amount of surprise that my qualifications did not make all employers leap at the offer of my services. For eight weeks I had written "promptly yet carefully," as the scholastic agents advised, to all those advertisers who expressed their desire to engage young men, "Public School boy preferred." My object was to earn a living, not to cavil at the means.

It was by complete accident that I found myself in the scholastic profession, or was it my headmaster's testimonial: "Can keep perfect order with ease"? There must be trades and professions where other qualities than disciplinary ones are looked for.

However that may be, when I had begun to give up hope of ever receiving a reply to any letter of application, I was telegraphed for by an agent in Villiers Street,

scarcely looked at by him, despatched to Blackheath, and engaged on the instant without reference even to the testimonial about discipline. I was taken by the headmaster to a small study where sat a man at least twice my age whose bushy moustache lent him an air of great ferocity. I was told that I was to share his room. He regarded me with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. The headmaster left us together. I felt like a rabbit confronted by a stoat.

He knew from my clothes (I was wearing a very high, stiff double collar, a blue waistcoat with little yellow spots, a blue suit and yellow pointed shoes) that I was not a University-bred man. With years of underfeeding I could not be mistaken for an athlete.

"You read a lot?" he asked.

I confessed with some enthusiasm my liking for *Dr. Nikola*.

His tone was both incredulous and icy as he asked me to repeat the title.

"I meant real books," he said.

To me *Dr. Nikola* appeared to be about the most real book I had ever read. I think I must have said so.

"Have you ever heard of the World's Classics?" he asked.

"Never," I replied.

"They cost a shilling a volume," he replied, "and if you are wise, and wish to get out of this appalling abyss in which you have unwittingly fallen, you will spend all your earnings in buying and reading this series. Then you may fit yourself to do something else beyond wet-nursing the half-witted sons of snobbish stockbrokers and Mincing Lane merchants. This is the most dangerous profession in the world. You'll probably like it until it's too late, and then you'll hate it, and not only spoil your own life, but the lives of generation after generation of small boys who might make something of life if you hadn't interfered."

"You want perhaps to know why I stay in it when I realise how killing and useless it all is. I'll tell you. I took a good first at Oxford. I was just in the middle of

the Civil Service Exam. when I caught a chill. You can only take that exam. once. My chance had gone. I had no alternative but to teach. I've been teaching for twenty years, but I'm going to get out. I'm going to be an opera singer. If I didn't believe that I should commit suicide to-night. Have you any interests at all ? ”

“ I like reading,” I said. It was all I could think of.

“ So you said. If all your interests are as wide we're in for a jolly intellectual companionship. I suppose you've arrived in a full blaze of school colours ? ”

“ I got my Shooting Eight,” I said modestly.

“ That ought to be a tremendous help with our seven-year-olds. I've often felt a strong temptation to shoot the lot, but I hate bungling a job.” He regarded me over the top of his pince-nez fixedly for some time rather like a doctor or a judge. “ Among your other assets I suppose we can count a perfervid interest in the scores and bowling averages of all county cricketers.”

I blushed easily in those days.

“ I'm afraid,” I said, “ that I don't read newspapers much. Sometimes I see what Derbyshire are doing.”

“ It's lucky you don't come from Yorkshire,” he said, “ a Yorkshire man would be lynched for daring to confess such a lack of loyalty. What are your interests ? Are you a natural historian ? There are plenty of bugs on the heath as you'll find out after ten years of daily games on it.”

I had to confess my ignorance of all wild flower, wild bird or insect life.

“ What was the name of your school ? ” he asked.

“ Denstone,” I replied rather proudly.

“ Ah ! ” he said. “ A Woodard Foundation. I ought to have known. You would never descend to anything so mundane as insects or literature. But on the Higher Criticism you are probably a world authority. You know the latest theories about the actual date of the Beginning of the World.”

I recalled the fact that in my Bible the date was given as 4004 B.C.

“ I repeated this. He looked up quickly.

"You are not, I hope, pulling my leg," he said.

I looked so blank that his question was answered.

"That's good," he said, "very good. Now at last we know where we are. You and I ought to get on very well, very well indeed. When conversation between us fails there are always exercise-books to correct, and I foresee that I shall enjoy that pastime much more than I used to. Perhaps, occasionally, a little game of cards?"

"I like cards," I said.

"Ah! that's better." He got up and took out two packs from the drawer of the little table in the middle of the room. "And what game do you prefer? We might begin at once. There's no time like the present."

"I play a good deal of 'Snap' at home," I said.

He put the cards down slowly, took a pipe out of his pocket, very slowly filled it, lit it and then, after an age-long pause, said:

"You smoke?"

I produced a packet of Woodbines. Even I could appreciate the shudder that crossed his face.

"Could you, do you think, learn to smoke a pipe? You see, smoking for you need no longer be surreptitious. It can be a lawful pleasure, if there is any pleasure to be got out of doing lawfully what has so thrilled you in secret."

He quickly picked up the cards.

"You don't play bezique?"

It was the first time I had ever heard the word.

"There's no time like the present," he repeated. "Let's strike a bargain. If you will swear never to smoke those (he could find no adequate adjective) cigarettes in here I will on my side introduce you to the much more soothing delight of bezique. We might in a few years rise to the giddy heights of backgammon, and some day, who knows, we might even learn chess. We are to have so much time together that we might as well learn something that occupies the fullest possible time."

But the inquisition was not to be so soon over. He found me an uncommonly interesting specimen. In the

intervals of explaining the intricacies of bezique he kept on firing off a sequence of personal questions.

"Do you imagine yourself possessed of a vocation for teaching?" he asked. "Have you prepared for it over a period of years, studying methods in technique? You know Thring, of course."

"I was going to be an engineer," I said.

"Oh, you're mechanically minded? That's useful. What made you change your mind?"

"I failed in the Higher Certificate, and I am told that I can't pass the London Matric."

"So that's your qualification for teaching. Perhaps it's a good one. You'll have a natural patience with the duffer that I certainly lack. But won't you be terribly disappointed not to go on with your passion for engines?"

I had to confess that I knew nothing of engines.

"I hope you're musical," he went on.

"I was in the choir for five and a half years," I said.

"Even while your voice was breaking? What a very unusual choir. You still sing?"

"I don't remember words very well," I said. "But I know 'Widecombe Fair.'"

"And 'Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay' I expect?" he said.

"Yes," I said excitedly. "How did you guess? I like hymns too."

"In music," he said, "we ought to have much in common. And what is your taste in art?"

"I'm fond of pictures too," I said.

I explained to him my delight in "The Soul's Awakening."

"I expect you'll spend a lot of time in the National Gallery," he said.

I had to confess that I'd never been inside a picture gallery in my life. I didn't know that people went to them for pleasure.

"You've got a very full life in front of you," he said. "You don't happen to collect stamps, do you?"

Again I had to disappoint him.

He surveyed me ruefully.

"I don't think Blackheath will approve of your clothes," he said.

This roused me to remonstrance. I asked him what was wrong with my clothes. They were my best, and very carefully selected to impress.

"They impress all right," he said. "I don't think I shall ever forget them."

Perhaps it was as well that I hadn't gone straight from Denstone to Oxford. But when, after two years of teaching, the chance was given me by an uncle to go up to the University, my headmaster did his best to dissuade me from taking it.

"You are doing good work here," he wrote. "Your energy is of the greatest value to us. If I thought you capable of taking an Honours School or of getting a Blue I shouldn't hesitate for a moment. I should say: 'Go.' As things are you will have the greatest difficulty in attaining a Pass Degree, and so far from getting a Blue it is difficult to think of any college small enough for you to secure a Colour for any game. At the end of your University career I doubt whether I should want you back. All you will have learned in four years is to spend money that you haven't got."

That letter piqued me so much that I accepted my uncle's offer which I had already once refused, and I furthermore determined both to take an Honours School and to get my college colours for something, hockey perhaps. I was lucky beyond my deserts, for I took two Honours Schools and gained two Blues.

My four years at Oxford were years of almost undiluted happiness. I was wise to reject the advice to reign in Hell rather than serve in Heaven. Indeed I grew nearly to reign in Heaven. I found it great fun fighting to gain recognition in a big college, the great majority of whose members came from Westminster, Winchester or Eton.

Not that it required much fight. It might be thought that in such a society as Christ Church the old Wykehamists and Old Etonians would fill all the social clubs and run the college on their own lines. In point of fact

the man from the unknown school was accepted and judged entirely on his own merits.

The very first breakfast to which I was asked was by G. K. A. Bell who is now my Bishop (Chichester), but was then a complete stranger to me.

I was in the "House" Rugger team on my third day, I whipped in to Philip Wroughton as Master of the Beagles, I was elected to the two premier social clubs, the "Warrigals" and "Nondescripts," the premier athletic club of the University, Vincent's, which is limited to one hundred members, and a secret "House" society, which only meets once in three years.

In my work I was not so successful. I seldom understood the lectures in Mathematics to which I devoted my first two years, so I was not surprised at getting a third in "Mods."

Then I had the great good fortune, through G. H. Mair, to meet the most inspiring figure in Oxford, Sir Walter Raleigh, who suggested after my poor class in "Mods." that I should take the new School of English Language and Literature of which he was the Professor.

The Dean, who regarded Raleigh much as he regarded Bernard Shaw, as unacademic, unsound, and only superficially brilliant, did his best to dissuade me from taking this school. It meant that I should have to start all over again and take "Pass Mods." I did that in my stride in one term. It meant that I should have to have an extra Tutor outside the "House." Charles Fisher was my "moral" tutor and Ernest de Selincourt of Univ. became my English tutor.

I got a typically Raleighan letter in the Long Vacation of 1907 telling me how to set about reading English.

"You can't really know much about English Literature," he wrote, "if you limit it to 'office hours.' You must treat it as a pastime, and then you soon find that you can pick things up everywhere, like a jackdaw. Always look inside books, if only to see what they look like. Give them a chance: some will catch you, some won't. It's the stray knowledge that is useful . . ."



My first cricket trousers



Imogen

"It's a bad thing to read till you're stupid. You can learn a lot that is useful (for real literature) out of doors if you're interested in it. All the swells knew a heap of other things besides books."

Why had nobody in all my life written to me like that before? Perhaps I might even have made some headway in mathematics if they had. This letter made me Raleigh's slave for life. We all venerated, we all loved him.

His lectures were not lectures at all. That tall thin delicate figure with the long sad face was "a ghostly tower." He was a legend long before he died. I can conjure up his face and form exactly now, though his voice which was deep, musical and conversational, has grown dim. He strode down the lecture hall in Examination schools to a high dais, gave us one look, usually I feel, of deep disgust, and began to talk and read.

"Gentlemen," he once began (most of the crowded hall was filled with women undergraduates), "it is said that rabbits see nothing comic in the sight of other rabbits. That may explain why some of you see nothing out of the common in Jane Austen's portrait of Miss Bates."

"I wish I loved the Human Race ;
I wish I loved its silly face."

That was typical Raleigh.

He carried under his arm great antique folios with tabs stuck into them, and we would stare spellbound as his trembling hand sought to find this and that passage at the apposite moment. This trembling affection of the hand which made turning over the pages so distinct and difficult an action, screwed up, as Stephen Potter reminds us, the attention of the room. It was as helpful an impediment to him as Arnold Bennett's stammer was to him and Winston Churchill's lisp is to him.

Raleigh's was an unforgettable personality. I never missed one of his Wednesday afternoon seminars at Magdalen in spite of the fact that they came at a most awkward time for me. His new house on the hill above Ferry

Hinksey seemed to be book-lined in every room and passage from floor to ceiling, but I find that I wanted to browse among his shelves less than in any other don's house. I was much too intent on listening to his conversation. I remember sitting up very late after dinner one night arguing about the possibility of a race between two crews in the same boat, even numbers all pulling one way and odd numbers pulling the other.

He was the most unprofessorial professor who ever lived. I suppose it was he who implanted in me my deep distrust of examinations, as he certainly planted in me the seeds of enthusiasm for books which I was afterwards in my turn to spend my life in handing on.

When I went down, in spite of the fact that I again only succeeded in getting a "third," he gave me a most glowing testimonial in which he surprised me by saying that my degree did not represent my merits, and the least flattering part of it read :

"If his degree is ordinary, his character is not : it is of a rare simplicity and modesty. He is a delightful member of any society and is sure to be liked."

But social and athletic activities left me little time for work. I spent the greater part of my leisure on the running-track, not because I liked running, but because it was the thing I did best. My running was as accidental as my reading of English. All members of the Rugby Fifteen were asked, indeed commanded, by the captain to put in an appearance at the "House" Sports, and knowing me to be slow in the field he entered me for the longest race, the Two Mile. I was given 380 yards start and won it so easily that I was seized upon by some of the University Committee who were looking on to run against Rugby across country for the University "A" team. I came in second. The next season I came in first in all the cross-country races during the Christmas term, and got a Full Blue by being the first Oxford man home against Cambridge in the Inter-University race. I eventually became President of the Cross-Country team, and managed also to get a Half Blue for the Three Mile, but I disliked the monotony of

track-running. I ran cross-country for Derby County, and at some country track meeting I was once honoured by a visit from a bookie while I was changing. He offered me five pounds to run second. The only other attempt to bribe me came many years later when the leader of a band at a mannequin parade offered me a similar sum to mention his band in my paper.

But what I most enjoyed about Oxford was the life outside schools and the track, the social side. One night stands out most vividly in my memory. It was in Eights Week 1907. Our boat had gone Head of the River for the first time for forty-nine years. In our excitement in the afternoon we all swam across the Thames, one of our number, Lord Feilding, going within an ace of drowning in so doing. It was, and is, customary to celebrate these successes by Bump Suppers followed by bonfires on which were thrown the furniture of undergraduates who were unpopular. We would then leap through the fire ourselves in dress clothes. This ceremony was repeated every Guy Fawkes' Night. But on this rather special occasion it was decided to attempt a more ambitious programme.

A huge grand stand was in process of erection for the forthcoming Oxford Pageant on our own sports-ground which lay on the further side of the river Cherwell. It was decided to make a raid on it and set fire to it. The plans leaked out, and a special posse of police, together with the Oxford Volunteer Fire Brigade, kept watch over the threatened structure.

It was a bitterly cold evening for May, and it was not until our college bonfires had burnt out that we carried out our raid. A bridge of seven punts was thrown across the Cherwell and over this the first contingent of raiders quietly made their way. I was a member of the second decoy contingent, ordered to make as much noise as possible and rush the river by the performers' bridge. As most of the planks had been removed from this, and the police were holding the further side of it, most of us fell or were thrown into the river. I managed to get out on the further side only to receive a crack on the

head with a truncheon and be hurled back into the water. I swam down a little way, and then managed for the second time to reach the further shore. This time I was laid out by the force of the water from the firemen's hose which was turned on to the oncoming mass of undergraduates. While this battle was going on the first contingent took the opportunity to get the grand stand ablaze. Some of the more drunken then foolishly set fire to the Pageant Master's tent and threw his roll-top desk into the river. As that seemed a little unnecessary a small body of us fought to get it out again, and again I was knocked into the river with a truncheon. It was difficult for the police to distinguish between the would-be saviours and destroyers of the roll-top desk. Eventually we retrieved it. It was a grand battle. Again we joined the main body only to be driven back by the hose-pipes. This time George Hope, a Rowing Blue of great spirit, managed to break through the cordon and cut the pipe. That was the end of the battle. The Fire Brigade were put out of action. Then there followed a battle for policemen's helmets, and at midnight we retired, nearly all of us richer by some hard-won trophy. So far as I can remember everyone in the House was fined £3 or £5. I do not think that the Pageant authorities were out of pocket. I was the richer by the nozzle of a hose-pipe. It was certainly the biggest "rag" of my time.

It says little for our foresight or commonsense that when Lord Haldane came to plead with us to join the O.T.C., warning us of the German menace, we jeered and cat-called, threw stink-bombs and drove him out half-heard, while the hysterical revivalists Torrey and Alexander secured converts to their cause in hundreds. I attended their meetings, but I refused to stand up to show that I was saved, and in a personal private interview I found the courage to tell them that I thought little of their methods.

There was an elderly canon who tried to convert us by giving a terminal breakfast in the Town Hall. This was a meal I never missed, not because I cared about this method of conversion, but because the breakfast was

good and one's neighbour as likely as not would be a negro or an Oriental.

The only Oriental I knew at Christ Church was the Gaekwar of Baroda whose rooms were just above mine. I remember him mainly for the number of his trunks, and the fact that his sheets were of silk.

My rooms were in the small and supposedly select quadrangle known as Canterbury. At the entrance to each staircase was painted a list of the names of the undergraduates on that staircase with full titles and initials. In other colleges the surnames alone were painted, but presumably the "House" was so full of noblemen that commoners had to have the distinguishing mark of "Mr." The majority of my contemporaries were of course killed in the War, but among those survivors who have either achieved fame or had fame thrust upon them I remember a few. Lord Eustace Percy, who became Minister of Education, was a very fair-haired, good-looking, studious undergraduate who read history, won the Stanhope Prize for English Essay, and spent his leisure running with the beagles. Ivan Snell, a saturnine giant who played full-back for the University, and acted with great gusto in the O.U.D.S., is now a London magistrate; and Wilfred Greene, a pale scholar with a very pretty wit who always overworked, has already become Master of the Rolls. G. H. Mair, in many ways the most brilliant man of my year, afterwards a journalist of quite remarkable calibre, was even in those far-off days a sick man. I met him for the first time over a matter of food. Coming home one late afternoon from beagling I found a most luxurious tea already spread out, and without waiting to debate its origin I ate the lot and had just finished when a knock at the door was followed by the appearance of George Mair's white face. "I wonder whether my tea has by any chance come by mistake to you," he said. The reason for the mistake was fairly natural. Our orders to the kitchen were signed with our surnames, and "Mair" and "Mais" are almost indistinguishable. In spite of his inability to play any game he was elected a member

of "Nondescripts" and was a great power in the "House."

I got to know him even better after he came down, for when I was a master at Rossall he was on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*. When he became engaged to Maire O'Neill I used to go and stay with the Irish Players just for the pleasure of seeing them act the plays of J. M. Synge. Indeed I was still an undergraduate when Mair first took me to see them play *Riders to the Sea* on a wet Thursday afternoon in the half-empty Corn Exchange in Oxford. It was the first time that I realised the strength of keeping quite still and speaking softly to heighten dramatic tension. I had previously only known the "Herod-ing" methods of Beerbohm Tree.

Sir Patrick Munro was a diminutive Scot who played scrum-half for the "House," was captain of the University Rugger Fifteen and also of Scotland. He has now retired from the Egyptian Civil Service and is Member for Barry.

Stephen McKenna, the novelist, was as an undergraduate, very neat and precise in his person, and divided his leisure between playing Soccer for the "House" and praising the works of Turgenev.

Once a year eleven of us used to travel to Dummer, a country house belonging to Sir Nelson Rycroft, now Master of the Vine, then a keen cricketer, to oppose an eleven composed of members of his house at Winchester.

We used to drive to many of our cricket matches round Oxford in a coach and four. As we all wore grey bowlers and gay buttonholes we created quite an impression as we drove through the streets of Abingdon or Witney, trumpeting our long coach horn without cessation.

When the Burlington Club played the Atheneum Club of Cambridge they wore light blue ribbon down the sides of their trousers and unopened bottles of champagne were placed behind the wickets, a picturesque gesture to suit a picturesque age.

Most "House" men had plenty of money, but I don't think there was much extravagance. The legend of men lighting cigars with five-pound notes did not, I think,

have its origin in Oxford. Most of the men with whom I "messed," John Penrose, now a gunner of some importance, Frank Lascelles, a prominent insurance man, Douglas McNair, one of India's leading judges, and Edward Lane-Claypon, now a fruit-farmer, were men of far more frugal habits than I was. I used to run up big bills for books at Gadney's, I was always hard on my clothes, I certainly wasn't prepared to lunch off a glass of milk or lemonade and a bun in J.C.R. like most of my contemporaries. I spent both time and money on the theatre, though probably not so much of either as the undergraduate of to-day spends on the cinema, which was of course not going in my time, and if it had been I am sure that it would not have been patronised as it is now, in the afternoons.

The Oxford tradesmen tell me that the present-day undergraduate has no money, but the shops seem to me to have altered scarcely at all. What has probably altered is the giving of extensive credit. We could run up bills to an almost unlimited amount, and it was certainly in Oxford that I acquired the habit of not worrying how I was going to pay for things. If I wanted them I had them. To-day if I want them I still have them. I still buy more books than I can ever find time to read, and, alas, in early or expensive editions. I still buy pictures even though I have long ceased to have wall space for them. I find it difficult to pass an antique shop, and if I go inside I find it still more difficult to leave it without buying something.

I certainly spent more money than I could afford. I certainly wasted a prodigious amount of time. I certainly ought to have worked harder and more methodically, but I owe my awakening to the delights of the æsthetic and social side of life to Oxford, not only delight in books, but delight in the countryside and my fellow-man as well.

Oxford is surrounded by villages, river-valleys and ridges of hills of an astonishing beauty and variety. I made their acquaintance, as I ran and read, by accident. I owe my love for the valley of the Windrush, partly to

Compton Mackenzie's idyllic romance *Guy and Pauline*, and partly to the fact that I was sent to Minster Lovell to be "crammed" for "Smalls." That was my introduction to the Cotswolds, and I used to go out from Oxford Sunday after Sunday partly to renew old friendships in these Cotswold villages, partly with the idea of training for cross-country and track-running, though the only result of continually walking thirty-four or thirty-five miles every Sunday at four miles an hour meant that I got over-tired, went stale, and certainly failed to appreciate the colours and contours of the Cotswold stone manor houses. Yet I managed to see enough to fall in love with them, and there are few places I get more joy in revisiting than the Ridgeway that runs along the top of the Berkshire Downs to White Horse Hill, the winding valleys of the Evenlode and Windrush, and the upper reaches of the stripling Thames above Bablockhythe. Happy indeed is the man who spends his adolescent years in such rich surroundings. The atmosphere of age, beauty in stone, and graceful leisure extends beyond the Tudor country-houses to Oxford itself. Oxford still bears the stamp of the royal pleasance that it became when Charles I made it his headquarters.

In my time at any rate life at the "House" was very much a country-house existence. Our every want was instantly catered for. We had but to shout for our scout, and immediately the courteous, almost P. G. Wodehouse-like valet-butler would appear to attend our wishes and see them carried out. Our rooms were lofty, capacious, panelled and very old. It is true that we lacked the lovely seclusion of the Canon's garden which has now been commandeered for undergraduate use, but on hot summer days we lay idly in the shade of the poplars and willows of the Cherwell pretending to work, but more usually and more profitably asleep, eating or engaged in philosophic discussion. And how we talked. To-day I imagine that undergraduate talk is mainly sociological or political. In my time the only place for politics was the Union, which appealed mainly to those who were about to embark on a political career. We talked in the main

religion and æsthetics, but we were easily diverted from these serious topics by the prospect of a "rag."

When Charles Lister was sent down for his Socialistic opinions he was given a glorious procession of hansom-cabs and taken in a glass hearse to the station. The "debagging," followed by immersion into the fountain pool of Mercury in Tom Quad, of an unfortunate who had incurred communal displeasure, was one of our more amusing pursuits. We seemed to delight in hunting down the unpopular. Oxford was much less inclined to the policy of *laissez-faire* in my time than it is to-day.

The code of what was and was not permissible was pretty strict. Certainly the latitude in present-day clothes would not have been allowed to pass uncensored at the "House." To get drunk was forgivable, to proclaim oneself a theosophist meant debagging and immersion.

I doubt whether I ever enjoyed a day of my University life more than that on which we loosed thousands of rats and cartloads of pigs in the middle of the "High." I cannot remember the occasion. The frequency of the "rags" showed how young we were. Often at nights we would go out after hours with the express purpose of encountering the proctors and running from the "bulldogs." It was an unfair business because the bulldogs wore bowler hats and were often fat and scant of breath, while we were all in superb training. It was as unfair as the race run round Tom Quad after dinner between Bill "Milligan," the Olympic runner, and the late Lord Birkenhead, both equally brilliant of speech.

I do not seem to have treated Oxford with very great solemnity. Perhaps that is why I was honoured by election to the "Survivors." Few of its members were remarkable for holding authority in awe, though one of our number is now President of Brasenose. But my pride in being a member of the "House" is so great that I still wear, day in, day out, year in, year out, that vivid blue and white check "House" tie, which is vulgarly known as the "duster."

There may be something inherently snobbish in the flaunting of an old school tie. Old Wykehamists and

Old Etonians are much given to the wearing of their school colours. But I am inclined to think it is justifiable pride. I rarely or never see an Old Denstonian tie. I have never worn one and never felt any temptation to do so.

You will look in vain at Denstone for my name on any honours board in Big School. At the end of five years when I was a School prefect my own housemaster asked me my name. Mr. Calder Marshall, who wrote a novel based on his experiences as a master there, once wrote to me: "There was a tradition that you were either a master there at one time or a boy. I could never find out which."

But every time I put on the "House duster" I get a warm glow of pride in recollecting that I belong to so honourable an institution and an equally warm glow of happy memories of great days past, of dark winter nights jogging along country lanes in the "House drag," coming home from beagling, leg-weary, dozing, and dreaming of the almost unbelievable glory of one day wearing a dark blue scarf, and a dark blue blazer with a wreath of silver laurel and the letters O.U.A.C. inscribed on the pocket. And there were other dark nights equally memorable when I would be returning leg-weary by train from Uffington or Adlestrop or some other little station dimly lit with oil lamps. I believe to-day that Blues are no longer held in awe, but even though I joined that select band, and in spite of the ravages wrought by the years I find myself still treating certain fellow-members of the Survivors, Harold Barker, A. C. Gladstone, H. A. Gilbert and Pat Munro in particular, with a respect that I do not so instinctively afford to other members who have risen to even greater heights. And the reason is that in spite of the greying heads and increased girths I still see them as Titans because they rowed, or played cricket or football against Cambridge.

And I am further reminded by my tie of Great Tom's nocturnal toll of one hundred and one booming strokes at five minutes past nine every night to call in errant members of the "House," to remind them of the fact that their numbers were once limited to that strange figure

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and that a fine is imposed on all those electing to come in after nine-twenty. After twelve-twenty the gates were finally locked and no entrance was permitted even on payment of a fine. Undergraduates of other colleges had to be in college or digs by midnight.

I remember the night when Christopher Tower, then Master of Beagles, after dining with the Bullingdon, walked for a wager in his evening clothes and evening shoes right through the night to Reading, arriving there with soles worn through and bleeding feet which kept him in bed for a fortnight. I cannot remember whether he was sent down for a term as a punishment or not. It was not a popular thing to be absent for a night without leave.

My tie reminds me of an occasion when we carefully filled Lascelles' hip-bath with water, and so adjusted it above his door that on his arrival it would descend on his head. Unluckily his scout opened the door for him and received the whole of the shower-bath.

One of our favourite occupations appears to have been the dismantling of a friend's rooms in his absence and rearranging it so that he should find on his return his sitting-room turned into his bedroom and vice versa. As this game began by placing his hip-bath well filled just inside his sitting-room his first recognition of the change was usually a wet and sobering one. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that certain men decided to "sport their oaks" whenever they went out to a "twenty-firster" or other merry party.

When I went into "digs" at St. Aldate's our main evening amusements appear to have been the flashing of torches on to the heads of passers-by below and then, when they looked up, turning siphons of soda-water on to them. Alternatively we would disturb the quietness of the night by hurling electric-light bulbs on to the pavement.

It all sounds on looking back as if I was enjoying life hugely and not growing up unduly fast. My tie seldom reminds me of reading in the Bodleian or of visits to my tutor.

I owe my Maths. tutor three great debts of gratitude.

Despairing of my efforts to cope with the intricacies of Pure Mathematics he introduced me to the delights of *The Ring and the Book*, took me with him to sample the even more strenuous joy of climbing in the Lake District, and to ensure that I should do a little work before the examination "rusticated" me (in the true sense of that word) to a small mill at Tredington, on the Fosse Way, where I nightly listened to Cotswold farm-labourers singing folk-songs in the inn, daily walked the hills, discovering more and more hidden gems of Tudor architecture in Bourton-on-the-Hill, Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Stow-on-the-Wold, and other villages that had altered scarcely at all since Shakespeare's time. I learnt no more mathematics, but I got to know and love Shakespeare's England. There is a broken arch in a field near the Four Shire Stone through which I once saw the sun set, which stands to me for all the magic that there is in this word "England."

And when it came to my turn to read English de Selincourt soon came to take my essays as read. I would begin to read my weekly effusion, which always ran to great lengths, was wholly derivative, and contained no original comment whatever. He would look nervously at the number of pages, and interrupt me skilfully after page three with some such irrelevant comment as: "What was the track like this afternoon after all the rain?" And English would thereafter be forgotten.

I was lucky to get a degree at all. But I liked all my tutors. They gave excellent breakfasts and even better dinners. I seem always to have appreciated good food. That is why I seldom miss a "Survivors'" Dinner.

On going down from Oxford the wise graduate will expect to be completely forgotten in a year except by college porters who have royal memories. But I was staggered to receive a telegram on 20th May, 1937, asking me to judge the O.U.A.C. v. England Sports just thirty years after I got my Blue. I took great delight in giving two new A.A.A. records, one in javelin-throwing, which I had never even seen, much less judged, before.

Chapter III

ROSSALL, 1909-1913

IT was not until I read Mark Benny's remarkable biography *Low Company* that I discovered how similar are our Public Schools to Borstal Institutions.

Admittedly the Borstal system is based on the Public School system. It has succeeded so admirably and so easily that pages of *Low Company* might well be substituted for what I have to say of English Public Schools. Boys run away from both. In both bullying reaches a pitch of insensate cruelty.

On the strength of my Double Blue, and in despite of my failure to snatch a higher class than a third in two Honour Schools I was in immediate demand on coming down from Oxford.

I don't know why I went to Rossall.

The notice on its main gates: "No one admitted except on business," made it look more like a gasworks than a school. Its unimaginative red brick must have repelled any parent who believed in the necessity for beauty in education.

It looked as if boys were sent to Rossall purposely to be out of the way of the temptation that beauty brings. They were to be brought up on the stoic principle that it is good for man to be uncomfortable, a principle that is so hard to eradicate that I still sit on the edges of chairs, still refuse ever to wear slippers or a dressing-gown lest I should become effeminate. I should still be taking cold baths in winter were it not that my love of cleanliness is even greater than my love of the godliness of the gods of Sparta. Before I went to Rossall I had never worried overmuch about discipline. I had never any cause to worry about discipline, then, earlier or later, and yet because of my experiences there, I still, thirty years afterwards, suffer from the schoolmaster's nightmare in which

one's class is reduced to pandemonium owing to an inability to keep order.

As the result of the interview that I had with the headmaster I was offered the post of mathematical master, form-master of the bottom form, and English master of the Shell. For this I was to be paid £150 a year including board and lodging for the nine months of term-time, certain monies to be deducted for a pension scheme.

I was asked if I had taken a diploma in education. Rather shamefacedly I had to admit that I hadn't.

The headmaster's brow cleared. "If you had I shouldn't have had you. We want no theorists here. There's only one Theory of Education. Keep order. You start with an advantage. Boys always respect a Blue. Keep a tight hand. No fraternising."

Tentatively, wondering whether I was capable of rising to the high level of teaching English to the Shell on the strength of the Third, I asked what, precisely, "English" meant.

"Oh," he said, "that's quite simple. We only need one hour a week for English. Let me see. That is a School Certificate class. For next year they've got to read *Julius Caesar* and Macaulay's Essays on Warren Hastings and Clive. You ought to be able to cover that in the time."

"In what time?" I asked.

"In a year. They've got three terms in which to read a play and two essays. These boys aren't reading for fun; they've got to get through the examination. Schools are judged on results. Your job is simple. You've got to get them through the examination. They've got to work on these set books at once and keep their noses down on to them for the year. You think it is too little?"

"It's scarcely a year's reading," I said.

"You'll find it'll take them all that time, and I'm glad you think it's so simple. You won't want to bring forward any excuses if they fail."

It was then that I should have resigned and searched for some school where English was taken seriously. It's easy to say that now, but it has to be remembered that

I had never taught boys over preparatory school age. I had still to fathom the dullness of the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old who would have been superannuated from almost any other Public School.

Boys were not expelled for failure to come up to standard intellectually. Only flagrant stealing and blatant immorality were dealt with so drastically.

I was given a large sitting-room with a huge circular table that creaked and turned and afforded a good deal of fun to the dozen or so boys who used to sit round it every day eating bananas and cream and chocolate cake. There were also many bookcases which I kept as richly supplied as my table. The table was the bait for the shelves. My aim in life was to make youth read and enjoy reading.

My bedroom was lofty with bare walls down which the damp would pour like rain. It looked out over sand-dunes to a grey sea. I was attached to the house of L. R. Furneaux, a delightful, friendly, scholarly enthusiast of literature who was always jumping about. His sense of values was odd. When he caught a boy in his house tapping nails into his study-wall his rage knew no bounds, and he would thrash him until the boy would scream, whereas if he caught him stealing, lying, cribbing, bullying or indulging in unnatural vice he would be so gentle that the boy would think the offence to be trivial. The result was that Furneaux's boys seldom defaced their walls.

This sensitive scholar with a deep love of literature was unhappily thrown into a community where reading meant reading for examinations. Reading for delight was regarded as the mark of the dilettante. He was not regarded seriously by his form, the Lower Sixth, who spent much time in trying to rouse him to one of his ungovernable fits of rage, no difficult task in view of the fact that one false quantity was enough to give him indigestion for a day. His digestion never got a chance. It is odd to remember that he was also O.C. of the O.T.C. His nickname was the "Pup."

The Senior Master, Hainsworth, nicknamed "Ben Chow," was a generous-hearted North countryman,

whose fame rested mainly on the splendour and plenty of his teas.

It so happened that a large percentage of the boys in my form were in his house. It was remarkable for the fact that the housemaster knew little of what went on under his nose. It had one advantage. It was not a snobbish house. One of the most pleasant boys in it was the son of a Hereford grocer, one of the most unpleasant the son of a grocer in Derbyshire.

Furneaux's house was recruited mainly from Ireland, easily reached from Fleetwood. Hainsworth's was full of Lancastrians who made no effort to cure themselves of a dialect that found favour on the lips of their housemaster, whose favourite phrase was : "Look see."

J. F. Marsh, commonly known as "Cabby," was mainly memorable for his corpulence and the fact that he held the record for the highest score ever made in the 'Varsity cricket match. It was said that in order to secure this record he had turned a certain victory for his own side into a draw. He was responsible for games.

It seemed to me, coming fresh from Oxford, to be a heavily moustached staff. Some may have grown a moustache to hide a weak mouth.

Perhaps if there had been more marriages there would have been fewer moustaches. I attribute nearly the whole of Rossall's weakness to the fact that it was almost rigidly monastic. The "houses" were not houses in the ordinary Public School sense. They were just dormitories built round an ugly barracks-square. No housemaster was allowed to be married, and if any senior master had the temerity to marry he, *ipso facto*, ceased to be a housemaster.

The absence of all feminine society had a disastrous effect on everybody. It was unnatural. It meant that our rooms were untidier and dirtier than they would have been if any woman had ever been permitted inside. It meant that there was no corrective to the gospel that would have us believe that there was some virtue in trying to work in cold dark classrooms at 7.30 on winter mornings, that hard benches were good to sit on, and

that pictures on classroom walls were as insidiously evil as soft cushions. In my fury I compelled my boys to take cushions into class. I nearly lost my job for that gesture of defiance.

Boys are as queer as women, but not so unaccountable. Every man knows that women are incapable of following an argument, but boys who are as sensitive as the most delicate barometer are at the same time capable of the most staggering acts of cruelty. Boys, who like to rebel against a master who shows any sign of weakness, refuse to rebel against an established custom even when led by someone whom they normally obey without question.

The perpetrators of tradition in Public Schools are not the old boys, but the boys themselves. There is no "Die-Hard" in the House of Lords to compare with the average schoolboy. The boys at Rossall who would have benefited in food, in comfort, and in companionship from a feminine invasion, would have been the first to resent it. So the masters had to sublimate (is that the word?) their natural desires in the taking of violent exercise.

I didn't see either the folly or humour of this until years afterwards when I read of the then headmistress of Sherborne Girls' School, adjuring her girls to run about like the boys of the Sherborne Boys' School in order that they should not think of them.

It so happened that I had made a fetish of violent exercise, thinking every day wasted in which I did not play a game so fiercely as to sweat prodigiously and to ache physically. So I elected always to play either with Furneaux's house-team or to coach the unfortunate heterogeneous mass of ungainly louts who were not good enough to play in house-games. These were known as the "Hoy." I ran about wildly, accusing this player of laziness and that of clumsiness, barking out advice unceasingly under the impression that I was doing noble work, until one day the house-captain of Furneaux's asked me if I would be so good as to tone down my enthusiasm and help the elevens a little less. It was a great blow to my self-esteem, and it took me a long time to realise how right the boy was.

In my perfervid way in trying to rouse enthusiasm I was killing it. It was like recommending books. I had to be careful not to let myself go in my enthusiasm for books if I wanted to get my boys to read widely.

My time was very fully occupied. In the whole working week I had only three hours off, and these were filled with correcting exercises. Each morning we were called at 6.30. Morning chapel was at 7.10, a perfunctory service which did much to give the boys a distaste for all services ever after. From 7.20 to 8.15 I was expected to teach and boys to imbibe mathematics on an empty stomach in a cold classroom. From 9 till 9.45 I would correct work, and from 9.45 till 12 I was in school. I reserved 12 to 1 as an extra hour for backward workers. Luncheon was at 1.20, and by 2.15 we were changed and on the football ground. Tea (in one's own rooms) was at four o'clock, and afternoon school ran from 4.30 to 6.30. Dinner in Common Room at that hour was followed by an hour's correcting of exercises before chapel at 8.35. More correcting of exercises till 10.30 saw me usually dropping off to sleep. But I managed to escape to Blackpool on Saturday nights either to see a play or to dance with mill-girls in the huge ballroom of the Tower or the Winter Gardens.

I learnt a good deal from these girls of the escapades of the Rossall boys who managed to climb out at night to meet them among the sand-hills for a smoke or a flirtation. This seemed to me an inevitable corollary to the repressive anti-feminine spirit of the school. I refused to be starved of my need of the society of the other sex, nor was I ready to confine my universe to this block of red-brick buildings.

This may sound strange, because my enthusiasm for my work was at least as great as that of any other single member of the staff, but I meant to keep one outlet open. I refused to be so caught in the system as to have no wishes or desires outside. Indeed I seem to have been critical of the system from the beginning.

From the very start I objected to the system of compulsory chapel. There must be discipline in religion as

in everything else, but the whole object of organised religion is defeated if services turn worshippers away from rather than towards God. Evensong on Sunday was always popular. Weekday matins before breakfast encouraged active distaste, ribaldry, and in the end loathing.

I objected to the insistence on rewards and punishments. Every day after luncheon the school sergeant, nicknamed "The Guntz," used to drill a squad of unhappy offenders whose names were entered in a book by masters for lateness, talking, eating in class or other minor offences. If a boy got three drills in a week he was caned.

Every Saturday I had to waste over a couple of hours collecting and collating marks to get out a form-order which seldom provided any indication of anything except to harass housemasters about the state of health of boys under their charge who had fallen from top to bottom of their class in a week.

I resented intensely having to correct exercises. It dulled my brain, and was of no value to the boy unless I corrected it by his side. The trouble was that so much work was being done that little of it meant anything. The object was to keep the boy occupied all the time, acting on the principle that if a boy is given any leisure he is bound to utilise it viciously. This in itself is the most damning indictment of the whole Public School system.

The mark system put a premium on cribbing. The prep. system meant that elderly louts compelled their fags (who were overworked anyhow) to do their prep. for them in addition to their other duties of brewing tea, making toast, going to the tuck-shop, taking messages, cleaning boots and so on.

I resented the rule that a member of the staff should never be seen smoking. Masters' mantelpieces were crowded with pipes and tobacco-jars, and yet their pupils were supposed not to notice them. I often felt like suggesting that parents also should be compelled not to smoke lest it should incite their sons to imitate them.

Nor were we allowed to drink in Common Room. A siphon of soda was provided for the Vice-master. The rest of us had to make merry on water until we got back to the seclusion of our own rooms, where presumably we might indulge in the vice of drinking by ourselves.

But the thing that I rebelled against most forcibly was the edict that junior masters should refrain from forming friendships with their boys, thus reducing our status to that of prison-warder. I disregarded this edict, and continued to disregard it.

I threw open my room to any boy who chose to take advantage of it, either to read in, eat in, keep warm in, or talk in. What happened was that certain older boys made my room their rendezvous for meeting with younger boys in other houses. Such friendships were not only considered undesirable and strictly forbidden, but regarded as highly suspicious. Immoral relationships were immediately suspected and, being suspected, took place in far larger numbers than would normally have been the case. There is a good deal of difference between passionate friendship and an act of unnatural intercourse, and if they had been allowed to run on unchecked, or if they had been encouraged, many of these friendships between older and younger boys would have resulted in nothing but good.

But I had my eyes opened in my very first term by the discovery of secret notes that had passed between two boys which led to wholesale expulsion.

I had my eyes much more widely opened at a later date when one of my own pupils came to me to rescue him from the importunate advances of his aged housemaster, who was a parson. To so great an abuse does the monastic system lead.

The discovery killed the old man. I blame from beginning to end the system. If housemasters had been compelled to marry instead of being compelled to be celibate this grotesque unnatural situation would never have arisen. I was glad that I had kept my own lines of communication with the outside world open.

Talk in Common Room and among the boys was

almost wholly concentrated on football. All my life I had loved games, but I now began to see in them a very grave danger. They were used as a medium to divert boys from sexual temptation, but they also diverted him from every other human interest.

It is true that there wasn't much to interest anybody in this desolate seashore and flat hinterland, but there were wild sea-birds, there were wild plants, and there was an estuary. During my first term at Rossall in 1909 Paulhon, Rougier and Farman all flew above Blackpool South Shore and over the heads of two hundred thousand excited spectators. I managed to get leave to take seven boys out of a school of three hundred and fifty to see this epoch-making event. We went back to form the nucleus of the Rossall Model Aeroplane Club. We were laughed at for a few weeks, and then forgotten. It was too early for flying to be considered seriously.

The only other outlet beyond games was the Corps which frankly bored every member of it except a young housemaster, L. H. Trist, whose every spare hour was spent in working out schemes for route-marches and field-days. He was a completely single-minded enthusiast of O.T.C. work. He was an excellent schoolmaster of the stoic type and regarded me as a very misguided and rather dangerous innovator who would turn the whole world upside down by encouraging boys not only to read and like poetry, but actually to write poetry. "There's only one English poet," he would say, "and his name's Kipling."

"And he's only written one poem," I would retaliate, "to your liking. And that's 'If.'"

"And don't you think 'If' a grand poem?" he would retort.

"I can think of better ones, and by Kipling," I would say.

But Trist and I, in spite of fundamental differences of outlook, got on well. We were both enthusiasts, and it mollified him, though it surprised him, to find that even my hedonist self was a keen supporter of the O.T.C. I actually liked drilling and being drilled. I disliked

dressing up in a uniform, but I revelled in field-days, partly because of my love of maps.

Rossall had a very high reputation in camp. Our marching, according to the reports of inspecting officers, was as steady and rhythmical as that of Sandhurst cadets. Our percentage of Certificate "A" successes was higher than that of any other Public School. This was all due to the influence of Trist who came into his own when the War, which he had so often foretold and always prepared for, actually broke out. He got a D.S.O. and bar before being finally invalided out with the rank of Colonel. He was a great soldier and a schoolmaster for whom I have always had respect.

He always took the trouble to know his boys. He never sentimentalised them, and if he did not spare the rod he did not use it to indulge any sadistic passions of his own. On the other hand he would have regarded the formation of a society for the observation of wild birds as effeminate, and a society for making model aeroplanes as wildly gimcrack. And yet he strongly approved of *Stalky and Co.*

It will easily be seen that I found it easier to make friends with the boys than with the masters. I found that I quickly made friends with a few boys, and having made friends they remained friends. Only death has separated me from most of my Rossall friends. Most of them were killed before the end of 1915.

Of those who are still alive I remember most vividly the son of the head of a famous salvage company, who used my study to secrete loot that he had himself salvaged from wrecks. He read widely, and spent all his spare pocket-money on books. It was he who first introduced me to the work of William McFee and David Bone. I wish I could remember which of us it was who first chanced upon Tomlinson's *The Sea and the Jungle*. I hope it was he, because my first edition (once worth £40) is missing.

An even more enthusiastic reader was the son of the head of the most famous banana importers in the country. He used to keep his house well supplied with this fruit

which used to arrive weekly in crates. He was in my form when Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy" appeared in the *English Review*. I read it aloud on the day of its appearance to the class, and once more I was on the verge of being sacked for encouraging the use of oaths. As a private in the O.T.C. I was privileged to hear a good deal of the everyday language of the schoolboy, and I am prepared to bet that Masefield heard nothing more lurid sailing round the Horn.

But it is one thing for a boy to employ oaths to his friends, and quite another to hear them pass the lips of his form-master even in the form of a quotation from a poet. Had Masefield been Poet Laureate at the time I might have escaped censure. But he was not. He was completely unknown, and the *English Review* was suspect from that moment.

Most of the friends whom I made took kindly to my books, forgetting to return them, or returning them so much the worse for wear that I could easily see that they had been used more as missiles than missals. Others took kindly to my cakes and ginger ale. One in particular went so far as to get permission to leave the room as soon as he got into class in order to remove the unfinished cake from my tea-table to his own tuck-box. He was expelled for stealing.

Life really was quite eventful. On the first or second night of my second term we had to spend half the night scouring the beach and the frozen fields for the Common Room head-waiter. I found him at last partly submerged under the broken ice of a small pond. It was an unsatisfactory night to choose to drown oneself. He had or imagined he had cancer.

Boys ran away and boys were recaptured. I do not recollect any boy during my time attempting suicide, but suicides or attempted suicides have been known in Public Schools.

With grounds continually under water and gales persisting for seven or eight days without intermission football often became impossible. Greatly daring I inaugurated school paper chases in the place of House Runs

and incurred thereby general wrath for not arranging for a roll-call to be taken on setting out and coming home.

As it happened no boy died on these runs, though many of them deserved to get pneumonia through dawdling along in drenched vests and shorts. The wise ones probably disappeared into one of the out-of-the-way village inns and spent a jolly unlawful hour by the fire drinking "Swipes."

Spied on at all other hours and their whereabouts completely accounted for, boys (according to my opponents) actually seized the opportunity of these unregulated paper chases to get up to all sorts of mischief. So new rules were formulated to cope with this, and make it impossible even for a runner in a paper-chase to evade surveillance for a minute. The similarity to Borstal can scarcely fail to strike you as close. I almost expected the spy-squad to carry carbines instead of field-glasses. And in spite of this constant calling of the roll and supervision youth did manage to indulge its passion for tobacco and beer and illicit friendship unseen and unreported.

The summer term was a little less dreary for me because I bathed every morning before chapel in the sea. It was typical of Rossall, which was on the sea, that no boy was allowed to bathe in it until he became a monitor.

The long hours of hot sunny half-holidays had to be spent willy-nilly in amazingly tedious games of cricket. I am myself very fond of cricket in spite of my inability to excel in any branch of it, but I can very well see that for many boys it is completely pointless.

I had to supervise, umpire in, and occasionally play on "Hoy," again bellowing instructions to the batsmen to hold their bats straight, play forward, and keep the right foot still as they stepped across the wicket to hit the ball to the off. But the fielders would hang about with their hands in their pockets longing for the time when they could lie down on their rugs and chew their chocolates, "rag" each other unsupervised, go to sleep in the sun, read magazines, or escape for one brief ecstatic minute to the tuck-shop.

I have known time pass too quickly. All my life has passed far too quickly. Here only did the summer afternoons seem endless, and I felt it incumbent upon me somehow to keep these "rabbits" roused. At some stage of the afternoon I always had to allow the game to degenerate into a game of tip and run, and it was always at this stage that the headmaster, an enthusiastic cricketer and a stickler for decorum, would come round to see how the rank and file were getting on.

"It's a pity you don't try to teach them the rudiments of batting instead of letting the game deteriorate into this farce," he would boom, and then devote a fearful five minutes to teach some terrified child into holding his bat straight while the rest of the side would stand round praying silently that no catch would come their way and that the "head" wouldn't pick on them as the next example. It usually restored his good temper to show anybody how anything ought to be done. And anyhow his presence helped another long-drawn-out minute to pass.

In the middle of the summer term came Speech Day, and Rossall became more completely transformed than Oxford in Eights' Week. The staff all appeared in strange and glorious clothes. The square and playing fields became gay with smartly-dressed sisters and cousins. There was a big luncheon to which none of us went. There were prizes. There was any amount of boosting of Examination successes and, best of all, there was no compulsory cricket.

Speech Day and Confirmation Day were the only two occasions in the whole School year when the boy could call his soul his own. And the pity of it was that when freedom and leisure came like this so rarely he was totally unfitted to use them profitably. He mooned about listlessly waiting again to be dragooned into some activity.

Perhaps he had time to try to reconcile the theory of life advanced from the pulpit with the practice of life as evinced in the headmaster's report. In chapel he was told that a life of self-effacing service for his fellows is the only way of life. From the Big School platform he was

clearly told that his business was to swell the number of successful candidates in the Higher Certificate and to get a scholarship to one of the older Universities. It appeared to strike nobody that there was anything wrong in judging Rossall by the number of Certificate holders and successful scholarship-hunters.

The only true gauge of a school's worth is got by testing the average. Did the average Rossall boy develop many-sided interests? The answer emphatically was no. All his energies were diverted into one channel. He was compelled to devote himself to games, however much he disliked them, however little he was able to adapt himself to them.

Most boys didn't actively rebel against this. It was the religion of their time. They accepted it, and indeed as true conformists imposed the tradition in their turn without questioning its validity.

It was the religion of the time that work should be tedious, and avoided when possible, but that each boy could work out his own salvation by playing games as fiercely as he could. A slacker at work was held up to admiration as someone who had defeated the master; a slacker at games was held up to execration as one who had let down his house. The effect of this tortuous and irrational code of ethics on me was not immediate, but it was final. I was enthusiastic about everything. I was very fond of games. Indeed I owed my job to my physical prowess and nothing else. My path was made easy because I was a Blue. I was genuinely held in some awe because of this strange possession and no boy was able to understand my belittling it. But I wanted to see enthusiasm in widest commonalty spread.

I tried to stir up enthusiasm in the School Debating Society but, as boys were never allowed to discuss any subject that directly affected their own lives, it was scarcely surprising that debates were ill-attended or that the speakers relied on the type of facetiousness that one associates with the Oxford Union.

I met with much greater success in a private literary and debating society that I held in my rooms every

Saturday night. It meant foregoing the delights of dancing in the Winter Gardens, but it was worth it, for I allowed these boys to debate any subject that they liked. In their excitement they became loquacious. They learnt how to marshal argument and how to refute the logic of the antagonist.

I learnt a good deal of the workings of the boy mind by this means. It was soon realised that I was to be trusted, and things were blurted out in the excitement of these argumentative evenings that I should never have discovered otherwise.

About cribbing, for instance. The only way to stop cribbing was obviously to encourage it or to set work where it was impossible. There were of course "cribs" to all Latin and Greek authors. The only way was to take it for granted that they used them and ask them to improve on them, a not very difficult task. The ethics of cribbing are exactly those of the man who travels first class on a third-class ticket, or for that matter, of the burglar. He takes a chance. If he can get away with it he can.

I used to trust my boys with everything. They added and gave up their own marks instead of those of their neighbour, which I regarded as an infamous practice that led to all sorts of corruption, bribery and bullying. Some cheated of course, but others learnt to be truthful for the sake of being truthful.

If a boy cribbed in my form, and I had every reason to believe that such a thing happened on rare occasions, I refused on that account to turn myself into an invigilating policeman. I set myself rather to devise lessons where cribbing was impossible.

In the ordinary school algebras and arithmetics sets of answers are added to the end or sold separately. Naturally boys managed to get access to these under a system where it was necessary to secure so many marks every week. I abolished this temptation by inventing my own problems, writing my own text-books, by correcting only a percentage of the work shown up and that a haphazard percentage, and by distorting the whole mark system.

I tried to prove the absurdity of all marks by giving seventy or eighty thousand marks for the right solution of one sum, and one mark for the right solution of the next. This caused a good deal of complaint, and house-masters were not slow to bring the complaints to my notice. They were not impressed by my defence. My move was regarded as subversive. I on my part refused to change my tactics. My whole object was to make work interesting for work's sake, and I was prepared to throw overboard the whole system of rewards and punishments as obstructive. This nonconformity on my part did nothing to increase my popularity, but by great good fortune I have never let fear of unpopularity stand in the way of doing what I wanted.

I was extremely fond of almost every individual boy who came to me for work. I had a warm affection for all boys, but I was never greatly concerned whether this was reciprocated or not, which was just as well in view of youth's quickly changing loyalties. Mob loyalties are always fickle, and boys always move and think in mobs.

You can see that I didn't love boys because of their good qualities. They were liars, deceitful, treacherous, dirty, thieves, brainless, bored, cruel and vulgar. I was under no misapprehension about them, but I liked them about the place. I enjoyed teaching them or trying to teach them. I was under no misapprehension about my teaching capacity. I had to teach myself how to teach, and I never learnt. I always went too fast, especially in mathematics, a subject for which I have always had a sneaking affection, perhaps because the elementary part of it is so easy and the higher branches so completely baffling.

My success, in so far as I met with success, was in rousing even the louts of my form when I became form-master of Modern Shell to take an interest in books.

When I arrived I found that the method of "doing" Shakespeare was to read parts round the room like verses out of the Bible. When I first got boys to get up and walk about and declaim and act the speeches they were full of misgiving. When I encouraged them to bring

into class such clothes as they could find to dress the part it was thought that I was just asking for trouble. But instead of degenerating into an unseemly "rag" these simple movements and dressings-up turned a dull reading into exciting drama or laughable farce.

In addition to Shakespeare I managed to get them interested in modern plays, though this meant my buying twenty or so copies of each play on my own account.

From reading more widely they went on to writing more. Instead of confining composition to essays they began to write stories and poems and run their own form magazine. It took them a long time to realise that if marks had any value at all they might as well be given for everything, so the compilation of the form magazine became one of the recognised English lessons, recognised, that is, by me.

Some members of the form occasionally wished to know how such work was helping them to pass the School Certificate, but in the end, as I hoped, the bogy of the Examination was forgotten, and English was studied for its own sake. Few boys however could help suspecting a system which rewarded them with marks for doing what they liked rather than what they disliked. Gradually in the zest of invention many of them forgot that their first aim in class was to cause the maximum of trouble and do the minimum of work.

The appearance of Edmund Holmes's book *What is and What Might be* encouraged me a good deal. In it he made a plea for the development of the six instinctive desires of youth: (1) to talk and listen, (2) to act, (3) to draw, (4) to dance and sing, (5) to know the why of things, and (6) to make things.

Debating societies help the first, dramatic societies the second, artistic expeditions the third, choral societies the fourth, and the workshops the sixth. The laboratories and classrooms ought to be able to cope with the fifth. Put as Holmes put it, the principles and method of education are simple enough. It seems ridiculous that they should have been almost completely stultified either by stupidity or by faith in examinations.

One of the main charges levelled against the Public Schools is that they exist only because of the prevalence of snobbery. Parents can advertise their material prosperity in no better way than in casually letting it be known that they have daughters at Heathfield or sons at Stowe where in return for heavy payments they have the privilege of mingling on equal terms with the daughters or sons of dukes and earls and rich company-promoters.

It has never been claimed that the actual education provided at Eton or Wycombe Abbey is of a higher standard than that provided by Manchester or Bradford Grammar School. Snobbery cannot have played a very large part in determining a Lancashire mill-owner to send his boy to Rossall, for he would meet nobody mentioned by Burke or Debrett there. Indeed I was myself surprised at the amount of rich dialect I heard. It was, I think, regarded more as a place where a boy could get some of his rough edges smoothed, and learn to hold his own among his fellows. This I think Rossall succeeded in doing, though as a schoolmaster I did not like the parents' habit of removing boys at sixteen to put them into the mill.

The few South-country boys who braved this bleak northern climate usually stayed on till they went on to the University, but that was because the Southerners were usually scholarship holders. They would not otherwise have been sent to Rossall.

There was a sprinkling of country parsons' sons, and these were invariably the pick of the school. They were not spoiled by wealth, they were tough, they worked with a will, and they played like demons. I respected them tremendously. They suspected me, and I made fast friends with only two of them, a Cornish boy from Menheniot with whom I used to wander over Exmoor in the holidays, and a Hampshire boy from Northam who got a Double First and a Double Blue before being killed in the act of winning the V.C.

My closest friend was the son of the banana king, who was completely broken up by the death of his only brother in the War, and no longer cares to be reminded

about Rossall days. He lives the life of a recluse, emerging only to write a most powerful war play and a devastatingly acid picture of present-day India.

My other close friends were both Irish. I met one playing a barrel-organ outside Harrods, the other later became my chauffeur.

I remained at Rossall for four years, fighting hard to bring about an educational reform that most of my colleagues regarded as unnecessary and dangerous. Why I was not sacked I do not know. I must have been a thorn in the flesh of all the older men. The men of my own age were more easy-going. They were quite likeable, but showed no outstanding quality. Most of them are dead.

One Kuhlmann, a German, was mercilessly "ragged" by his form who used to let loose parcels of rats and mice and hunt them round and round the room with cries that could be heard all over the school. They used to light bonfires and let off fireworks in the paper-basket under his nose. If he was, as was rumoured, a spy, he endured much for his Fatherland. Even we on the staff used to stage "hoaxes" to add to his troubles. We went to infinite pains to make him chase me in the dead of night over the sand-dunes in the belief that I was a prefect caught or almost caught smoking in his room. It was a pretty mild sort of joke, but it kept us entertained for some time.

We were on the whole a timid and dreadfully law-abiding crowd. No monitor dare walk across the Masters' Lawn, and no master was ever known to walk across the Monitors' Lawn. I never saw a master even approximately drunk, which was strange, because as a boy I had myself been knocked down by a parson on the staff who came into form roaring drunk. As a staff we weren't much given to crime. Just before my time a bursar had absconded with a good share of the school fees or profits, but during my four years I can recall no instance of a master going to prison.

I think the best part of my life at this time was the annual O.T.C. camp at Tidworth Pennings or Farnborough. There I had the society of the boys whom I

most liked without the surveillance of senior masters who did their best to put a stop to all friendships between boys and members of the staff.

Looking back on this period of my life I seem to have spent my days chafing at regulations which interfered with my making personal contacts with my boys, and my evenings recovering in the Winter Gardens in Blackpool.

The miracle is that in this community of sex-starved middle-aged pedagogues things weren't much worse. I had to try to cope privately with individual cases of small boys being subjected to advances from their elders that were more than insidious, and I prevented a few expulsions, but on the whole I was not so completely ridden by the sex problem to the exclusion of all other problems as were my colleagues. I was far more excited and perplexed by the problem of awakening the eyes and minds of boys to beauty.

Given a free hand I could have got even the dullest of these boys interested in art or music or literature or natural history. But it was necessary first to make friends with them, and this was definitely discouraged. At one Common Room meeting the resolution was actually passed that no master should have any boy alone in his room for longer than ten minutes, and that no master should ever allow a boy to be alone with him in his room at all with the door shut. In the face of these two staggering resolutions, neither of which did I even attempt to keep, it was difficult to get down to the business of education at all. Nor did the school inspectors do anything to help.

In order to be recognised by the Board of Education we had to submit to inspection, which I welcomed. But it became purely farcical. One classical master drew a map of Syracuse on his board and rehearsed for weeks precisely the questions and answers that were to occur if and when the inspectors visited him. They left him severely alone.

I was visited often, the mathematicians doing all my work for me, the English experts sitting at the back taking notes.

They were polite in their reports about all of us. But

they didn't and couldn't see the things that really made or marred the school. It was like the mark system. They aimed by giving a quantitative mark to assess the qualitative, a completely impossible business.

What they should have said in their report was that the ugliness of the school buildings was having a degenerating effect on the school and should be blown up.

What they should have said in their report was that the staff, by reason of its own sexual repression, was far too much obsessed by sex, suspected unnatural vice everywhere, and in consequence fostered it just as a man who walks in daily fear of influenza is always more liable to fall a victim to it than the man who never thinks about it. The remedy here was to give the whole staff the choice between the sack and marriage.

The danger of being submerged was very real. Looking back on those years now, I remember that I not only liked schoolmastering, but would go back to teaching to-morrow if I were given half a chance. On the other hand, looking back on those years now, I wonder how I could have spent afternoon after afternoon rushing dementedly up and down the touch-line bawling: "Play up, School!" "Play up, Furneaux's!" as if the whole future of civilisation depended on the side I belonged to being victorious.

It was G. F. Bradby in *The Lanchester Tradition* who first blew that gaff. You remember Mr. Chandler returning victorious from his house-match. "Thank God! We have kept the flag flying!" and the devastating reply of Mr. Tiphani: "Where?" To me it was inconceivably disloyal of a housemaster to be absent from any of his own house-matches.

I was of course genuinely thrilled by the play, but mistakes on the part of one of my boys would draw from me deep groans and I would long for a cane to punish him, just as a good pass or a goal would make me also crack my throat with cheering and I would feel like giving him the moon. My enthusiasm was genuine enough. My feeling now is that I wish it could have been diverted into more profitable channels. To spend

the best years of one's life running up and down touch-lines urging youth to play a game more ferociously seems to me now a much less profitable occupation than almost any other that I can think of, certainly much less satisfying than walking over the hills, making money, or making love.

I was possessed, and still am, of almost inexhaustible energy, and I frittered away most of it in fruitless quarrels with the headmaster who was always accusing me, quite rightly, of showing little respect for his judgments, and in violent exercise which presumably performed the functions of holding me up as an exemplar to youth and of sublimating my sexual desires. My love was poured out on the boys. References in my diary are daily made to the great love I felt for certain boys who showed an equal affection for me and a due regard and enthusiasm for English Letters. A list of the books that I read and recommended showed how much we cared for the best among the new as well as the old.

During the Christmas holidays of 1912 I went to join my father and mother in Bath, a very refreshing change after Blackpool, for instead of having to rely for feminine charm on the attractions of Lancashire shop-girls and mill-hands I was now invited to all the local Hunt Balls and met the young and eminently marriageable daughters of retired generals and colonels. I enjoyed their society immensely, admired their beauty, ran with them to beagles, took them to the theatre (it always seemed to be Gilbert and Sullivan), entertained them to tea at Fortts, and played on the gramophone in our lodgings the dances that had thrilled us in the Assembly Rooms the night before.

There was a good deal of marrying going on, but it never crossed my mind that I was in any degree eligible, so I just passed from one to another of these girls and house-parties quite heart-whole but immensely gratified at being accepted as one of themselves in spite of my extreme poverty and obviously poor prospects.

Convulsions international or domestic seemed rare. The *Titanic* went down, Scott and "Titus" Oates died

like heroes, there were strikes, I became an officer in the O.T.C., discovered Chagford, and my eyes were at last opened to the wild beauty of Dartmoor. I discovered that a good number of the hymns sung in the school chapel were either pointless or immoral, and said so in public to the great consternation and indignation of "The Wykehamist". I wrote letters to *The Times* advocating national support for the Olympic Games on the ground that it fostered amicable relations between nations. I laughed at those who talked of a German menace. I heard two sermons on individuality that I have never forgotten, both from the Rossall pulpit, both from a man called Simpson, one a Fellow of Trinity, and the other a colleague. I was offered and refused the Headmastership of Chipping Campden Grammar School, and I resisted the efforts of the Bishop of London and the late Bishop of Oxford to make me take Orders.

And, most important of all, I was made Games Master, and immediately proceeded to change the school game from "Soccer" to Rugger. The anger that followed that move from old boys and the whole school is very difficult at this distance of time to credit. I could not have sinned more grievously if I had sought to abolish the National Anthem or the Throne.

I carried my way, and Rossall is now a fairly successful Rugger school. My contention was quite simple. It was that in the high winds, and extreme cold with which Rossall was so much visited in the two winter terms, Soccer was a totally inadequate if not impossible exercise. To run with a ball was always possible. To kick it meant age-long waits while it was being retrieved from distant fields.

Then quite suddenly I became engaged, not to the girl whom I had got to know best, seen most of, and best liked in Bath, where I had spent several holidays, but to a comparative stranger.

This of course meant leaving Rossall. I was married on 6th August, 1913, and in September became an assistant master at Sherborne.

Chapter IV

SHERBORNE, 1913-1917

DURING my four years at Rossall I can only remember being asked to one dinner-party, and that was of course at the headmaster's house. If any other member of the staff wanted to give a dinner-party he would have had to give it in Blackpool. There were no facilities in our studies for any more ambitious meals than the teas which we had to make for ourselves. Of the Rossall headmaster's dinner-party I can only remember his insistence on the fact that he too was a member of the "House," and that he was a contemporary of Sir William Beach-Thomas.

During my four years at Sherborne I seemed to be for ever attending dinner-parties. I remember at the first telling my neighbour how lucky I felt myself to be living in the same county as Thomas Hardy, to which she replied quite kindly: "You know we in Sherborne don't think Mr. Hardy is not quite a gentleman." That reminded me of a sermon I once heard from a naval chaplain at Rossall who told us that in his opinion George Eliot was not quite a lady, but, he added, "She was not altogether a *bad* woman."

The change from Rossall to Sherborne was almost like a change from the Pole to the Equator, so great were the differences. I am quite sure that environment affects character, and the miracle to me, in view of the arid, bleak ugliness of the Rossall coast and the prison-like appearance of the School buildings is that any Rossall boy emerged with any sense of the beautiful at all. Sherborne on the other hand is one of the most beautiful of all ancient English towns. It was in Saxon days the seat of a succession of Warrior-Bishops, whose spirits still loiter about the cloisters of that ancient monastery.

King Alfred is commonly supposed to have received his education here and Sherborne boys have been continuously educated ever since under the shadow of one of the noblest abbeys in England. It is impossible not to fall under the spell of Sherborne's beauty. Its contours are gracious, its warm stone houses are of a rare mellow beauty, its narrow medieval streets are quiet, and everywhere there are walled gardens and tall trees.

But it would be as difficult to explain the atmosphere of Sherborne to a Rossallian as to explain the sort of life lived by a West Country hunting squire to an unemployed man on the Means Test in Hebburn. You have to see both to appreciate either, and the advantages are not, as would appear at first sight, altogether one-sided.

To live in a house of my own in a community where everybody else lived in a house of his own and lived a normal life with wife and children after the Spartan monasticism of Rossall was like returning to civilisation after a singularly arduous campaign in the desert.

It was not surprising that the Sherborne boys were so well-mannered or so friendly or for the matter of that so happy. At Rossall no boy seemed to have any liberty at all. Everywhere was out of bounds and there was nowhere to go anyway. At Sherborne there were no bounds. The whole school had the whole of this lovely land at their disposal and could wander at will. At Rossall fraternisation between master and boy was looked upon with about as much favour as fraternisation between opposing forces in the trenches. They were, presumably, natural enemies, and this enmity was vigorously fostered. At Sherborne all these absurd barriers were broken down and boys and masters were encouraged to be on the friendliest possible terms.

I had left the camp of Sparta at last. But there were drawbacks. Sherborne was a land of lotus-eaters. I could not at first believe that boys could get through the day on so little work, or use so little energy. Gradually I found the insidious atmosphere making inroads into my own activity. I found myself always ready to go to sleep and seldom ready to get up.

I bicycled round the haunts made famous by Thomas Hardy. I followed in the footsteps of Tess over Batcombe Down to Beaminster, and in the steps of the fugitive Charles II from Trent Manor to Charmouth, I fought mock battles with the O.T.C. through the bracken of Sherborne deer park, once the home of Sir Walter Raleigh, I followed Miss Guest's beagles and the Blackmore Vale, I played a little rugger and less cricket, and then discovered that I had appendicitis.

I went into the nursing-home on 24th July, 1914, and died the following morning under an operation that lasted two hours. I only learnt of my death twenty-two years later. How long my heart stopped beating I do not know (was it twenty minutes?) but it was long enough for the surgeon to have given me up, when my heart began to beat again as suddenly and unexpectedly as it had stopped. He had no explanation for it. "These things just happen," he said, "once in ten thousand life-times." It was his only experience of the phenomenon. But more important events overshadowed my own puny misfortune.

When I looked out of the window of my bedroom for the first time after my return to life I saw what had been an ordinary field converted while I slept into an armed camp. Your awakening to the Great War may have been abrupt, but it can scarcely have been so abrupt as mine. You did at least have an ultimatum. You saw the war clouds gather. I went to bed with nothing more serious on my mind than the fact that I was missing Camp and that I might have to cancel my lecture to teachers in Stratford-upon-Avon. I woke up to a World War and I missed it. Most of my contemporaries at the "House" were dead by Christmas. Most of my pupils lived until 21st March, 1918. Not many after that. I remained, against my own inclination, but by command of the War Office, an officer in the O.T.C., training younger men to die. I managed to get as far as a course on the barracks-square at Chelsea, where I passed out with 100 per cent on my map-reading exam. (and have never been able to read a map correctly since),

and very much less than 100 per cent on my company drill.

I got a telegram from George Mair asking me to take out a Propagandist film by submarine to Russia, and I often wonder how far I could have delayed the Revolution if I had gone. I believe Hugh Walpole eventually took it.

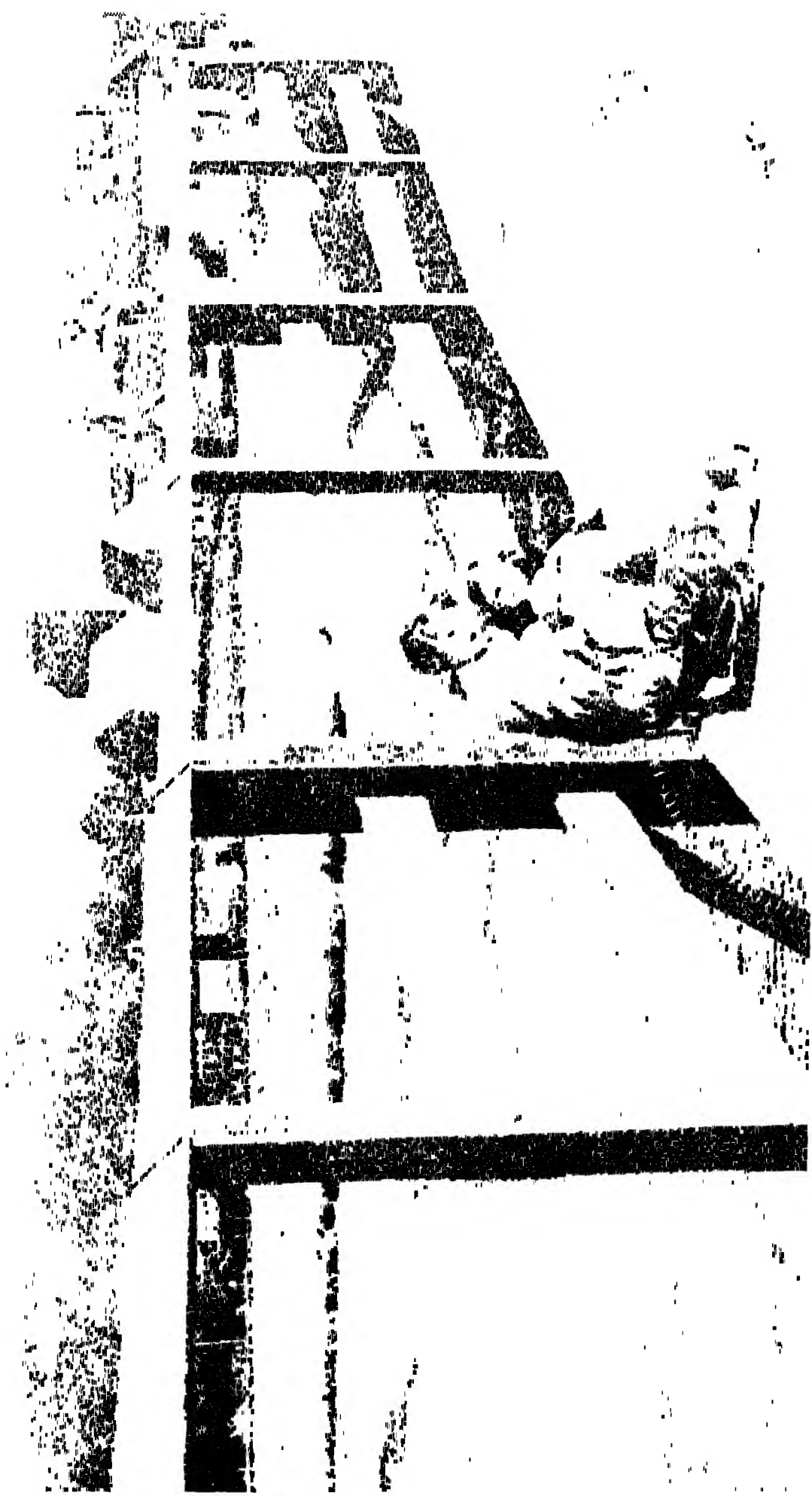
Most of the school staff went off to be killed quickly. They were replaced by temporary masters of advanced age and indifferent capacity, and even by young women of undoubted skill both in handling and teaching youth. Boys of course left at an earlier age, and responsibility devolved on youth at an unduly tender age.

The staff whether permanent or temporary were as friendly as the boys. They all seemed comfortably off, certainly lacked the rugged fierce individuality of the Rossall Common Room, and were inclined to take life much more easily, with the exception of the headmaster, Nowell Smith, who in spite of being a layman, far more closely approximated to my spiritual ideal than any headmaster I knew in orders. He used to prepare his school addresses with a most careful assiduity, and on one occasion when he was particularly anxious to make his listeners retain what he had to say he suddenly tore up his sermon and in its place read a most moving passage from Dostoievsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. He got Dr. Edward Lyttleton, who was then Headmaster of Eton, down to lead a discussion in Common Room about chapel services, and I raised a hornets' nest by putting in an impassioned plea for voluntary attendance at early communion which was ultimately carried; a thing that would have been completely impossible at Rossall. The whole curriculum was infinitely more civilised than it had been at Rossall. There was no early school, and no invigilation of preparation. There was no work before nine o'clock or after six o'clock. There was only one chapel service a day.

The most imposing figure on the staff after Nowell Smith was an Old Boy, G. M. ("John") Carey, an Oxford Rugger Blue and International. He was

respected and feared by almost everybody. He ruled his house with an iron hand, and bullied the school football fifteen into efficiency. At Rossall his tremendous vigour would not have been so noticeable. At Sherborne it was more than outstanding. It was unique. But he brooked no rival near his throne, and he regarded my opposition to several of his tenets as frankly disloyal to the school and made no bones about his enmity. We waged a good war for four years. My principal objection to his system was that I disbelieved in the theory of boys modelling themselves on masters. Merely to reproduce a world of Careys was not in my view good enough. It would be better than a world of kidnappers and gangsters, but it would not be an enlightened world. It would be brutish and intolerant, laying far more stress on the value of physical prowess than it deserved. I even wrote a play showing the disastrous effect of a man striving to make his boys copy him in every particular. Boys are already as imitative of their heroes as girls are of the manners and appearance of their favourite film stars. What I wanted to raise was a generation wiser than its fathers, better able to cope with world problems, more alert intellectually, more enthusiastic about æsthetics, and devoting less time to any one physical activity.

I thought even Nowell Smith was wrong in forbidding boys to follow hounds on foot. Most of them came from hunting families. They were being brought up in the heart of one of the most famous of all hunting countries. It seemed to me a waste of good time for boys to go down to the playing fields every day, and so seldom to get to know the beauty of the surrounding country. They occasionally got a glimpse of the distant dim blue loveliness of the richly wooded Vale of Avalon and the tower-surmounted knoll of Glastonbury Tor from the golf-course, and we had field-days against Bruton and Downside, but boys were not I think encouraged to visit the prehistoric figure cut in the hill-side above Cerne Abbas, to look for badgers on High Stoy, or to climb the ramparts of Cadbury Rings.



Jill, Lalage and Dragon at Old Shoreham



Lalage and I at Woolacombe

"John" Carey was a single-minded man of great simplicity and blind devotion to his job. He found it extremely difficult to regard with composure the sight of a Blue pleading for less stress to be placed on school games. He believed that all boys should be good footballers, and held the even stranger belief that good footballers make the best citizens.

A more congenial companion was the very delicate and scholarly Wade-Gery who came up to my house to dine on the hottest night of the year in a muffler and great-coat and in the winter walked through an icy drenching blizzard in tails, and no hat or overcoat. He was completely absent-minded. He went out to Salonika and quickly achieved high distinction and won many military honours. He is now a don at Wadham.

Several of the staff, like "John" Carey, were old Shirburnians, and as such very jealous of the school traditions, regarding my many attempts at bringing in reforms with the gravest suspicion. One elderly housemaster, however, H. R. King, whose daughter married the poet Cecil Day Lewis, who was in Carey's house, encouraged the youthful members of Common Room to try experiments. I was honoured by an invitation from him to join the "Duffers," an old-established and very select literary society which met only on Sunday afternoons to read papers. Alec Waugh, who was at that time in School-house, defended Byron in such round terms that he was very nearly expelled from the society. On the publication of his novel *The Loom of Youth* both he and (by a strange miscarriage of justice) his father, Arthur Waugh, managing Director of Chapman and Hall, were asked to resign from the Shirburnian Society. This meant that Sherborne lost a Hawthornden Prize Winner, and one of the most brilliant young writers of our time, for this expulsion of the Waugh family meant that Alec's younger brother, Evelyn, couldn't follow his father and elder brother to Sherborne. He went to Lancing.

King gave me an invaluable hint about the reading of poetry.

"Poetry," he said, "must be read aloud. You can't do that in the school square. Get on a bicycle. Leave it by the side of a gate. Walk into the middle of a field and act the scarecrow. Wave your arms and declaim your poem to the skies. Then you'll see what poetry is and does to you."

He was a great enthusiast, and was able to impart his enthusiasm to his boys. Robert Harris, the actor, was in his house at that time.

The "Duffers" was probably the most vigorous literary society in any Public School. I ran a literary and debating society for the rank and file which met with much greater success than the similar institution at Rossall for one very obvious reason. At Rossall there was no more freedom of thought than there was freedom of movement. At Sherborne there was both. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could induce any boy at Rossall to read any book for pleasure, and then it cost me the book, because no boy ever dreamed of returning it and the school library was housed in the old chapel, dreary, forbidding, and always shut when you expected it to be open. Nor did it contain any books that any boy could possibly wish to read for fun. The house libraries contained only fiction of the Ian Hay, P. G. Wodehouse, Edgar Wallace standard. There was no tradition of reading. There were no shops.

At Sherborne the school library was the most beautiful and oldest of all the school buildings. It had once been the Abbots' Refectory. It was a pleasant light room with comfortable chairs. It contained many books of extreme variety, interesting manuscripts, and good pictures as well as a good selection of the latest books on every subject. The school book-shop was well stocked and boys had access to it at all hours. Most masters owned good libraries, of which their boys had the run. The whole town had a bookish atmosphere, and if boys were asked out to tea by any of the local people the odds were on their being encouraged to browse among more books. It was as easy to interest Sherborne boys in reading as it had been difficult at Rossall. They took to it naturally.

Indeed such a premium was put on general reading that there was an annual prize amounting to twenty pounds' worth of books awarded to the boy who got most marks in an open paper on general reading.

This interest in reading led inevitably to a good deal of original writing, and in addition to the school magazine there were a whole series of unofficial organs of great promise in which school politics were freely and daringly debated.

Very few Rossall boys came from intellectual homes, but at Sherborne I had Sir Walter Raleigh's son in my form, as well as the son of the American educationist Homer Lane, who was then in the middle of his experiment of the Little Commonwealth. Young Homer Lane himself provided me with a very valuable lesson in education. It was from him that I learnt that most masters spoil their usefulness by trying to teach too much. He wanted to learn higher mathematics as he had easily outstripped the rest of the class in ordinary mathematics. So I put into his hands "F. S's" *Calculus for Beginners*, and without any help from me at all he proceeded to master this branch of mathematics much more quickly than I could have taught him.

From this time I began to teach less and let the class do more. In the end I got to the pitch of writing my own articles in class. I began visiting other masters' classrooms and inviting them to attend mine in order that we might learn something from each other's methods. I was surprised to find history masters sitting at their desks deliberately dictating the notes that they had themselves taken down years before in lectures at the University, and I would recall Raleigh's "I know nothing that can be best taught by lectures, except where experiments are to be shown. You may teach chemistry by lectures: you might teach making of shoes by lectures."

In the first place if a class is to be taught anything it cannot learn from a man sitting down. He ought to be walking up and down all the time. I remember Hadow's grand lectures on Aristotle at Oxford. As he paced

wildly up and down the room, gesticulating fiercely, no book or note within range, he would suddenly stop, and pointing a finger at one of us, say very impressively : " Suppose it were quite certain that you were to die next Tuesday, without any possible reference to futurity ; how would you spend the intervening days ? Think. As you now propose to spend them ? If not, why not ? "

At the end of two and a half years I applied for the headmastership of Bruton School and in a most glowing testimonial Nowell Smith was good enough to single out the work that I had done in arousing enthusiasm for literature. " The work that he has done in this direction at Sherborne," he said, " is perhaps the most noteworthy piece of teaching done here during the period of my Headmastership."

In addition to my school work I burst into authorship. I edited a series of Shakespeare plays for schools, attempting, as a sort of counterblast to the Verity edition, to eliminate notes to a minimum. I turned my Army class talks into an *Army Class English Course*, and a series of articles on *A Public School in War-Time* which attracted some notice when they first appeared in *Cornhill* were reprinted in book form. I met by this means Wilfrid and Alice Meynell and their children, and Eddie Marsh, who was then editing *Georgian Poets*. An article that I wrote on Rupert Brooke for the *Fortnightly Review* led to my lecturing on his work to the Lyceum Club. Not content with this I then wrote my first novel in the form of letters called *April's Lonely Soldier* and a second, *Interlude*, which described Sherborne so closely that I had to resign.

I had been at Sherborne for the same number of years that I had been at Rossall. My form, the O.T.C., and the members of the house where I had been house-tutor gave me complete pocket editions of Hardy, Kipling and Meredith to celebrate my departure. Instead of slinking out by the back door I was publicly proclaimed by Nowell Smith from Big School platform as a man who had done Sherborne great service. I felt

more like a Senior housemaster retiring voluntarily at the end of forty years than a young man resigning involuntarily at the end of four.

Arthur Waugh in reviewing a book of my literary essays in the *Outlook* commented upon this strange event thus :

“ The author of this collection of literary essays is a young and enthusiastic Public School master : and when a few months ago he was making a change from one school to another, his departure from the place where he had been working for four years became the occasion of an unusual demonstration of the good-will and popularity with which he was surrounded. It was not only that he was cheered to the echo at prize-giving and concert: but the school magazine came out with a glowing appreciation of his work from the pen of a school-prefect, the correspondence columns were further decorated with letters from his pupils, all bearing witness to the extraordinary influence which he had exercised over the minds of all the youths with whom he had been brought into contact.

“ ‘Never,’ so ran the chorus, ‘never was there a master so quick in sympathy, so helpful in advice, so illuminating in instruction, so patient with immaturity. He taught English Literature as it was never taught at school before. He made it a living thing. The school will never be the same again without him.’

“ Demonstrations of this kind are not so common that they can be easily overlooked. Schoolboys are not wont to wax enthusiastic about their masters, at any rate in the matters that belong to their education. How was it done ? What was the secret ? This book of essays explains it. The whole magical business was the work of a flaming sense of appreciation, which never talked down to its audience, but remained perpetually on fire to communicate its perfectly sincere enthusiasm to who cared to listen.”

I hated having to leave a place where I had been so supremely happy, where I had made so many staunch friends and been allowed, indeed encouraged, to carry out so many revolutionary experiments.

Even to-day I never pass through Sherborne without a quick nostalgic stab that I have never felt on my return visits to Rossall. I cannot now imagine how I managed to stand Rossall for so long. I cannot imagine how I ever managed to tear myself away from Sherborne. To me it still remains as the loveliest if the sleepest of all English towns.

Chapter V

TONBRIDGE, 1917-1919

FROM Sherborne I went to Tonbridge at about twice the salary. Rossall had been tough, hard-working, ugly and poor. Sherborne was cultured, leisurely, beautiful and poor. Tonbridge was cosmopolitan and rich. It was owned by the Skinners' Company.

If there were any profits at the end of the year at Sherborne they were divided among the staff in order of seniority. Tonbridge could afford both to pay its staff well and to attract the finest scholars by offers of £100 a year towards their education while at school, with the chance of further scholarships of £100 a year to the University. Consequently the scholarship standard at Tonbridge was very high, and was kept high by the Sixth Form master W. M. Gordon, an old Rossallian, now headmaster of Wrekin, one of the finest trainers of scholarship-hunters I ever knew.

Charles Lowry, the headmaster, had been a housemaster at Eton and headmaster of Sedbergh. I disliked the headmaster of Rossall, revered Nowell Smith, and loved Lowry, who was known to all the school as "Chas." He was a man of very unusual charm, quick wit, and fiery temper. From my point of view he was an ideal headmaster for he gave me complete freedom to try any sort of experiment that commended itself to me.

A. S. Neill had published *A Dominie's Log*, Simpson of Rugby had gone off to try a Commonwealth experiment of his own, and I decided to let my form practise the art of self-government. They appointed their own captain of form, and allocated various offices, from the Keeper of the Marks to the Keeper of Classroom. I

did less and less teaching with the quite certain result that they learnt more and more. They learnt the art of speaking in public. Everyone had to deliver one lecture a week on any topic he liked.

They learnt the art of criticism, for everyone had to write a report of each lecture and give marks for arrangement of material, clarity of delivery, and interest of subject, and the lecturer had furthermore to submit to a fusillade of questions, and was marked for his ability to answer. It paid him to speak on a subject with which he was familiar, and I was surprised to find how many out-of-the-way subjects were known to boys who in the ordinary school subjects betrayed no outstanding interest or ability.

They produced their own form magazine, their own play and their own cricket and football teams. They wove themselves into an entity almost as close-binding as that of a house. And yet the only really common factor about them was their age and their inability to cope with the ordinary curriculum.

I seem to have forgotten to say that they were not scholars. I was never invited to teach the brainy. My job was to make work interesting to the lout who was on the verge of being superannuated, and to the foreigner unaccustomed to the ways of English Public Schools. I had two most brilliant Russian Communists in my form, and the first business was to compel them to conform in the matter of personal cleanliness. Once we had got them to wash they became delightful companions and led the class easily in oratory and for the matter of that in personal courage, for they defended Communism in and out of season to a community that shuddered at the thought of Labour being allowed even a vote. The thought of Labour in control was in those days tantamount to anarchy.

I had also American boys, Belgian boys, French boys, and some from South America. Those who did not come from the ends of the earth came from the London suburbs. It made a strange mixture. Cosmopolitanism and surburbanism fought for supremacy. I

watched gleefully, for the crust of complacency was being broken in several places at once.

Perhaps the daily punctual humming of German bombing aeroplanes (a far cry from those aeroplanes of Rossall only eight years before) passing directly above my classroom on their way to deal death and destruction in daylight on London may have shaken some. Perhaps the insistent dull booming of the guns in Flanders never quite silent, and only too clear when the wind was in the south, was another factor, but whatever the reason Tonbridge seemed readier to adapt itself to changed conditions and to accept revolutionary reforms in teaching than I had dared to expect.

My relations with my colleagues, like that of the King with foreign powers, continued to be friendly.

Some of the older ones looked at me askance. The games master, like "John" Carey, a Rugger International, suspected my rather cavalier attitude to compulsory games, but he was too much eaten up with religious zeal to bother about me overmuch. But eccentricity was much less noticeable than it was at Rossall, for at Tonbridge, as at Sherborne, the staff led normal lives. They were nearly all married. They mixed with the townspeople, who were mainly well-to-do business men who went up to London every day, they were most of them members of the Town Club, so that they were not confined to the society only of other schoolmasters. But the staffs of Public Schools have a queer way of repeating themselves. It is just as if they are all cast for certain rôles in a play.

I always found one, and only one, master whose life was made a complete hell for him by the boys. The headmaster of Rossall was quite right about discipline to this extent. If you can't keep order you are wiser to be a dustman or a lavatory attendant. At Denstone there was one, at Rossall there was one, at Sherborne there was one, and at Tonbridge there was one master who was entirely at

the mercy of the boys. All four men were quite pleasant if ineffectual and feckless members of Society. But schools cannot afford to carry a master who cannot keep order. I owe my failure to have made anything of mathematics, a subject for which I had a strong liking, solely to the fact that for four years I had to sit under a Senior Wrangler at Denstone who taught me nothing but the art of master-baiting. If I had exerted one-tenth of the time, assiduity and originality that I spent on ways and means of devising new tortures for him on my work I should myself have been Senior Wrangler. But boys never tire of master-baiting. And once authority is lost it is lost for ever. I have seen these poor tortured creatures driven to such frenzies by the devilish behaviour of their boys as to rush at them with intent to do grievous bodily harm, but this has only spurred the torturers on to more knavish tricks.

The ragging of weak masters is on a par with the bullying of junior boys. It seems as inseparable from the Public School system as cruelty is inseparable from fox-hunting.

There used to be a continual procession from the tortured man's classroom at Tonbridge of boys sent to report their behaviour to the headmaster. Of course if "Chas" so much as poked his nose round the corner of this classroom there would be perfect peace and the order of a parade ground. No boy dare incur "Chas's" wrath.

I suppose in more ruthless institutions these inefficient masters would not be tolerated. Perhaps the Public Schools preserve one each as a public warning to the rest of the staff. If so they serve a very useful purpose.

Rather than submit to the indignity of being at the mercy of youth I should scarcely stop at maiming my first torturer. I should probably murder him.

Luckily the keeping of order comes about as naturally to the normal man as broadcasting. In both cases he just has to behave naturally and speak as one human

being to another. The boy, like the great bulk of the public, resents patronage and ridicules affectation.

I made great friends with the Senior Master, Alfred Earl, whose gifted wife was a daughter of Sidney Cooper, the Royal Academician, and whose son Sebastian, after a crowded and glorious life at Eton and Magdalen, took a first in Greats and won the Diamond Sculls at Henley before marrying Somerset Maugham's niece.

His house was more expensive than the others, because his boys had better food, which struck me as an unusual arrangement, but it obviously worked all right, for his house was always full. Certainly the Earls gave the most sumptuous dinner-parties that it has ever been my good fortune to attend in any private house. And the quality of the conversation was as rare as the quality of the food.

As Tonbridge is only thirty miles from London it was of course easier to cajole famous authors and actresses than it would have been in distant Dorset or far-off Lancashire, but as I looked round the table at some of the guests I could not help thinking of the one occasion when I invited famous guests to tea and chapel at Rossall.

Iden Payne and Mona Limerick were acting *Candida* in Blackpool and they came over to Sunday Evensong at Rossall. I nearly lost my job on their account. Boys weren't accustomed to seeing actresses occupying masters' stalls in chapel.

But at Tonbridge Clemence Dane was a constant visitor, not at Earl's house, but at the house of the only old Bedales boy I ever knew.

I have never been able to make up my mind about co-education. All reason is for it. In practice I am less certain. I like it in America. It would be silly to think of the sexes separated in American High Schools. Its opponents in England claim that it makes the girls mannish and the boys effeminate, to which I would reply that it couldn't make the boys more effeminate than some old Etonians I know or the girls more

masculine than some specimens I have seen from Wycombe Abbey. But as I lack first-hand experience of the workings of co-educational schools I cannot offer any reasonable criticism of them. All I do feel is that the segregation of the sexes from fourteen to eighteen is wholly irrational, and that what the sexes can learn from each other between those ages is of the utmost value to both.

The only advantage in separating them is on the mental side. Girls react in a quite different way from boys to different subjects in the curriculum, the girl being much quicker to take delight in literature, the boy in mathematics. But I should very much like to have had a year or two of teaching experience in a mixed school.

Our music master, Thomas Wood, was a little, young, short-sighted man from Exeter College, Oxford, who had sailed round the world with his father in sailing-ships and was therefore quite unexpectedly tough for a music teacher. He was a most lovable, simple-minded person, but little did I suspect from what I then knew of him that he would develop into the author of one of the best books ever written about Australia, *Cobbers*, and one of the most illuminating, scholarly and sensitive spiritual self-revelations of modern times in *True Thomas*.

The most energetic man on the staff was the O.C. of the O.T.C., F. G. Swan, whom I had met before, for he had been Captain of the Cambridge Cross-country Team when I was Captain of the Oxford side. He was as whole-hearted in his O.T.C. work as Trist of Rossall, with the result that the Tonbridge Corps were up to the Rossall standard, which was no mean feat in view of the fact that the War had been going on for nearly four years, and all the fit officers and senior boys had long ago gone to France or been killed.

We marched up and down the Kentish roads, we fought over the Kentish fields, and my first knowledge of Kent was a purely military one. Its right to the title of the Garden of England seems to me to be based on its capacity to produce apples and hops, for I saw very few gardens to compare with the rich gardens of

Sherborne, and though hopfields may be of the utmost value to the brewers they do not beautify the country-side. The orchards in apple-blossom time, on the contrary, do.

The Medway on which the Tonbridge boys rowed is sluggish, dirty and ugly. The school itself lost half its charm and all its seclusion by being on the main London-Hastings road. The High Street on Saturdays and Sundays was often impassable either on the pavement or on the road.

The country to the north led to the wooded North Downs near Sevenoaks, and the hidden ancient manor-house of Ightham Mote, but I preferred to turn my eyes southward beyond the noble Tudor Castle of Penshurst where Sir Philip Sidney was born to the spa on the hills beyond, at Tunbridge Wells.

Here there had somehow been miraculously preserved in the Pantiles a quite Johnsonian atmosphere. I don't suppose anybody was drinking the waters in these days, but it did bear some slight resemblance to Bath just in that one shady street. And there were good second-hand bookshops and antique shops. I never liked Tonbridge as a town. It seemed to me completely industrialised, but Tunbridge Wells, partly by virtue of its common and rather magnificent hotels still conveyed a sense of leisureliness and ease. It had not wholly succumbed to suburbanisation.

By far the greater number of our day-boys came from Tunbridge Wells. It was my first experience of them. At Denstone we had none, at Rossall we had none, at Sherborne, in spite of the school being reconstituted by Edward VI with the express purpose of providing a free education for the townspeople, we had none. At Tonbridge we had about a hundred. They were to us on the staff a bit of a nuisance because they were never there when we wanted them, but as a counterblast to any tendency to snobbery they served a very useful purpose. For the fees of a day-boy were low enough to permit of local tradesmen sending their sons to the school, and the wise among them did.

One of the brightest scholars of my time was the son

of a local cobbler. He won a £100 scholarship at Balliol and got a Double First.

One of the most satisfactory sides of Tonbridge life was provided by the private pupil system. Every master was given the chance of taking a certain number of private pupils, for whom he was paid extra at so much per head. He was not paid to give these boys extra tuition. He was expected to be their "moral tutor," and merely collect them in a body in his rooms one night a week to discuss any problem of the week that they wished.

I appreciated this a good deal partly for the sake of the money (I was now getting £500 a year), but much more for the chance of establishing closer contact with the boys. They brought all their problems, knowing full well that nothing could be used in evidence against them, and sure of their tutor's confidence. There were many boys who were afraid of taking their housemasters into their confidence who didn't in the least mind coming to me for advice. I appreciated the private pupil system a good deal.

Except for the War life passed fairly smoothly during those years. I remember "Chas" coming into my form one day, rushing up to the desk in his impetuous way, and saying:

"Boys. Listen. I've just had a letter from the Bishop of (he gave the name, but I've forgotten it), which I feel that you will like. Here it is."

He fumbled in his pockets, pretended not to be able to find it, then not to be able to find his glasses. Finally when he had got us all on the *qui vive* he produced it and read:

"DEAR MR. LOWRY,

"I think you ought to know that I have it on unimpeachable authority that you are harbouring in your midst a notorious drug addict. I refer to Mr. S. P. B. Mais. . . ."

He folded up the letter deliberately, removed his pince-nez and tapping them on the desk in front of him said:

"Well—boys—what are we going to do about it? Either we are nourishing a viper in our bosom or the Bishop is a silly and malicious old prattler. Well—I'm waiting."

There was a dreadful pause for about five seconds, then one bold child said: "Please, sir, I think the Bishop should be unfrocked."

The tension was released. The form bellowed with laughter and Lowry descending from the desk said: "I may take it then your form master is acquitted." I could not help wondering how the headmaster of Rossall would have dealt with that letter. I believe that Lowry's reply to the Bishop was so scarifying as to be unprintable.

I still went on writing novels and articles for the reviews and giving lectures in my spare time. I was furthermore elected Examiner in English by the London University for Matriculation, an appointment not without its humorous side, for English was the only subject in which I had myself failed in Matriculation. I failed in it twice.

I had by now had enough experience of teaching English to know more or less what English wasn't. It wasn't, I felt, just a mere matter of formal grammar teaching. It was a matter of using words in their proper sense and having a fair vocabulary from which to make selection. It wasn't a matter of being able to parse and analyse. Least of all was it the ability to paraphrase a poem, because one can no more paraphrase a poem than you can turn the Forth Bridge into a Bath Oliver biscuit. A poet presumably says what he has to say in poetry because that is the only fit and proper medium for him to express himself. To take it out of that medium and transplant it into another is simply to destroy it.

I was more inclined to look kindly on the art of *précis* because the faculty of shortening without losing the gist of a story is one of immense value as the acute

originators of that highly successful American magazine, *The Reader's Digest*, discovered.

But it is after all only one of the lower rungs of the ladder that is English to be able to summarise someone else's speech, article or story. A higher rung is that of being able to express one's own original ideas. In most examinations this had been catered for by the Essay.

My objection to the Essay is that it is almost the most difficult medium for self-expression, partly because of the artifice required to make it appear casual and artless. To write an essay one must, I feel, be an elderly man of great world experience, ripe judgment, wide vision, and deep reading. To be an essay writer you need the whimsical detachment of Charles Lamb, the catholic temper of Montaigne, the gusto, vigour, memory and intellectual sparkle of Macaulay, the philosophy, tested through the crucible of a sick body, of Johnson or Stevenson, or the critical acumen of Hazlitt.

In spite of this Examiners on Matriculation had expected candidates to be budding Bacons. In all my years as Examiner I only read one essay worthy of the name, and I was so excited that I went to the trouble of finding out who the candidate was. She was the daughter of the famous economist, Pember Reeves.

On the other hand most boys and girls can and do write verses of a quite creditable kind. I had seen so many good examples among my own boys that I decided to ask for some in Matric.

Most boys and girls can and do write stories. The trouble was to stop them. The trouble with a boy confronted with an essay to write was how to begin. I have never discovered the way.

Townsend Warner said that an essay should begin like a good dive. "Neatly in, neatly out, no splash." Bacon alone of all essayists fulfils that characteristic. Cobbett and Butler used to say that the only way to write was to put down what was in your head and then stop. And there is much to be said for the advice about keeping it short and concise. The idea that every essay should be built up from a skeleton with a beginning, a middle,

and an end, as well as an introduction and a peroration is absurd.

My aim as English examiner was to avoid a stereotyped paper for which pupils might cram. My aim was to find out whether they enjoyed reading and whether they enjoyed writing and if they didn't to see that the next lot of candidates did. I was not of course the only examiner, but I was allowed far more latitude than I ever expected, and I enjoyed setting the papers very much. Correcting them was a very different story. They completely stultified me with the mass of ignorance and prejudice that I was expected to wade through session after session.

I much preferred my work as Examiner in the School Certificate because this provided me with a means of comparing the English of different schools.

Everywhere the girls were immeasurably superior to the boys in the neatness of their writing, the thoroughness of their knowledge, the freshness of their criticism and in general appreciation of what they had read. They were obviously enjoying it. The boys were trying to pass an examination.

I began lecturing for the University extension classes at Morley College in the Waterloo Road.

Almost as soon as the War ended I was invited to become a member of a committee appointed to advise on the most suitable form of college for Royal Air Force Cadets, and when the findings were sent in and the college about to be opened I applied for and was given the post of Professor of English at the new Cadet College at Cranwell on a salary of £800 a year. I refused the honorary title of Wing Commander which they first wished to confer upon me. So in December, 1919, I bought a car, the only one I have ever owned or ever wished to own, and made my final break with Public Schools. In one way I was extremely sorry, because I had set my heart on becoming Headmaster of Winchester.

Lowry took the news philosophically, and as I was

leaving he thrust into my hand a half-sheet of grey note-paper.

On it he had written this poem :

THE LOST LEADER

I

Just for eight hundred per annum he's leaving,
 Just for a motor to ride in to School :
 Tonbridge of true education bereaving,
 Handing it over to Dullard and Fool :
 They, with the Treasury doling out Siller,
 Might have made up his poor screw to the 'Thou' ——
 How we were striving to put up our Salary
 Scale ! —— but there's nothing to show for it now !
 We that had borne with him, whitewashed his Interlude,
 E'en his philandering Schoolmaster's Diary,
 Stood his strong language, enjoyed his intolerant
 Scorn and abuse of us, fervid and fiery :
 S—— is of us, M—— is with us,
 B—— S—— are around us . . . they rust in their grooves !
 He alone shakes off the dust of his feet from us,
 He the sole expert in teaching that moves.

II

We shall go jogging on, shorn of his presence,
 Grinding the gerund, ignoring the lyre,
 Each of us thinking, with dull acquiescence,
 " I'll take it easy, let others perspire."
 Blot out his name then, record one left job more,
 One school more resigned, one more classroom bereft,
 One more Pedant's triumph and sorrow for Muses,
 One swerve more from Right, one more kink to the left.
 Air School begins : let him never come back to us !
 There would be Rage, Resignations and Rows,
 Ructions, Round Robins, and Rancorous Letters—
 One from the Vicar, and one from his Spouse.
 He will forget us, but we shall remember him,
 Seeing him plane to the top of the tree ;
 Then let him create the Air College of Cranwell,
 Honoured Sir Petre, O.M., K.C.B. !

Chapter VI

R.A.F. COLLEGE, CRANWELL, 1920

ON the 2nd March, 1919, while I was a master at Tonbridge, I received the following letter from the Air Ministry :

“DEAR MR. MAIS,

“General Seely has decided to set up a small Committee to advise on the question of special education for those who intend to adopt the profession of aviation, in particular their education prior to entering a Royal Air Force Academy with a view to training for Commissions.

“The terms of reference will be, To enquire how far it is necessary to give special education to those who propose to adopt the profession of pilot, whether in military or commercial aviation; and, if such special education is necessary, what form it should take and at what age it should begin, and to what extent financial assistance should be given by the Government.

“General Seely wishes me to convey to you an invitation to join this Committee, which he much hopes you will be able to accept. The following gentlemen have been requested to serve as members of the Committee :

Professor Sir Ernest Rutherford, F.R.S. (Chairman).

Dr. Halford Ross.

Colonel A. M. Longmore, D.S.O.

Captain Wedgwood Benn, D.S.O., M.P.

“Yours sincerely,

“W. A. ROBINSON.”

Without knowing in the least why I had been selected I accepted, and spent a good many hours examining witnesses of every degree of intelligence on points that came within the scope of our discussions.

I found a tendency to regard the specialised training given at Osborne and Dartmouth as unsatisfactory compared with the general training in vogue at the Public Schools.

Lord Hugh Cecil acted as Chairman owing to the inability of Sir Ernest Rutherford to accept the position, and under his leadership we issued a report of our recommendations.

At the end of December, 1919, there appeared an advertisement in *The Times* asking for applications for the Professorship of English at the new R.A.F. Cadet College, the salary offered being £800 a year. I applied, and after an interview with Air Commodore Philip Game, Director of Training and Organisation, I was invited to go up to Lincolnshire to meet the Commandant, Air Commodore C. A. H. Longcroft, C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C.

It was my first visit to Lincolnshire, and my first impression was that Cranwell was more remote from civilisation than Mullion. The journey from London to Grantham is quick and easy : but the local lines are very badly served. Cranwell is only thirteen miles from Grantham by road, but in order to reach it by train it is necessary either to go to Sleaford and then drive five miles or to Caythorpe which is four miles away.

The camp itself was extremely bleak, situated in the middle of a vast heath, high above the fens on the east and the Vale on the north and west. There was no accommodation for married couples beyond the Commandant's house and the Assistant-Commandant's bungalow.

It was a matter of common report in the Mess that the Commandant preferred an unmarried staff : he considered bachelors to be more efficient. In spite of this he built twelve huts for married officers, and huts were being constructed for married N.C.O's. Cranwell was

a very large station, and a great number of the men employed there were married. They had to live at a great distance from their work and great expense was entailed in getting them to and from the Camp. My house was ten miles from the College: there were other men who had to live in Grantham. On my arrival I found that the Cambridge don who had been offered the post of Professor of Aeronautical Science had declined on the ground that he could not find anywhere suitable to live. As I was intensely keen on taking part in the initial stages of the College I was ready to live anywhere. With great difficulty I secured a furnished manor-house ten miles distant for five guineas a week.

I took an immediate liking to the Commandant, who appeared to be obsessed by three passions, hunting, flying and Cranwell. He took me over the station with much the same air of eagerness that a motor-enthusiast would display while showing you his car.

I met a charming set of officers in the Mess, nearly all of them regular service men, either from the Army or the Navy: there was a useful element of University-bred men.

Attached to the civilian side of the staff were two instructors in Science, one from Tonbridge, the other from Glenalmond, while I had one assistant who also came from Tonbridge. The salary of an Instructor was £600.

The college opened on the 6th February, 1920, with 52 cadets, 15 of whom were naval midshipmen and had served in the War: two were Sub-Lieutenants R.N.: the remainder came from the Public Schools or elsewhere, and had either taken the Army Entrance Examination or been nominated.

We began with classes of eight, and the subjects taught included barrack-square drill, physical training, flying, theory of flight, workshops, English history, geography, language and literature, wireless, history of the R.A.F., Law, Sanitation, Meteorology, Armament, Science, Mathematics, Organisation of the Army and Organisation of the Navy. It was a very ambitious

programme, and for the most part the instructors were amateurs. They were keen, but they certainly had not studied the art of teaching.

The civilian staff were precluded from taking any disciplinary measures, and did not necessarily take a part in the life of the College at all.

The Cadets' Mess was frequented only by the officers commanding the two squadrons and their four assistant officers. At first other officers were encouraged to dine on guest nights with the Cadets, but suddenly they were forbidden to do so, on the ground that it was bad for discipline for officers to "rag" with Cadets. Consequently guest nights became as all other nights, and the Cadets were dispirited: they got tired of the society of each other and the lack of variety in their routine.

Change of front seemed to be the prevailing characteristic of the authorities. The Government were supposed to provide motor-bicycles for the use of the Cadets: when they arrived they were stripped of most of their valuable parts. The few Cadets who were lucky enough to get one which would function found themselves without any reason for owning it: they were not allowed outside a ten-mile radius, and Sleaford, the only town inside that radius, was out of bounds. On returning from an excursion so much cleaning was required that it was not worth while using them: so most Cadets declined to regard the use of motor-bicycles as a privilege at all.

Their liberty in games was somewhat curtailed at one period owing to the fact that the sports officer "posted" lists of what games they should play and who should play in them. Knowing little or nothing of the education of eighteen-year-old boys, the authorities fell between two stools. Most of the Service men were treating them like "fags" in a Public School: I was trying to treat them as undergraduates.

My lectures were much what I should have given to undergraduates who were to take a Pass degree. I wanted them to learn to think for themselves, to express themselves in speech and on paper simply, clearly and forcibly.

To do this I had first to allow them to write as they wished. It is, it seems to me, a point of paramount importance of Education that the student should first "sweat out" as it were the evil that is in him before the teacher can hope to implant new and healthier ideas.

The old idea that you could set a pupil down to a task, and ask him to write conventionally at second-hand on conventional, second-hand topics was scarcely calculated to promote individuality. It has been frequently asserted that you don't want individuality in the Services, but I had got it into my head that the Royal Air Force was new enough to discard worn-out ideas. At any rate I tried to develop individuality and my method was simple.

I gave my Assistant Instructor full scope to tackle history as he liked: he evolved a scheme which would have been wholly successful if the Cadets had really wished to grasp modern sociological and economic problems. I devoted my entire attention to English Language and Literature.

I soon found that my pupils were not ripe for a course of reading in the best English authors, and that they had not been accustomed to express themselves at all, either in speech or on paper. What was worse they didn't want to. They regarded me and my system with suspicion as subversive of conservatism.

I allowed them to show up one essay a week on any subject they liked. If they chose to criticise what I had been discussing during the week so much the better. They were rarely able to do this owing to the fact that they had read so little.

I read an immense number of extracts from authors of the stamp of Kipling, and asked for an appreciation. They were totally at a loss how to appreciate anything except *Tarzan of the Apes* and the works of Zane Grey. After many patient elaborations of my theme I got most of them to take the trouble to try to tackle more ambitious books, but it was six months before I was able to raise a library where they might have access to readable matter.

They then read George Birmingham, Ian Hay, and W. J. Locke; a few tackled Surtees, fewer still

E. V. Lucas. I read aloud extracts from Max Beerbohm and Masefield's *Right Royal* and *Reynard the Fox*: these pleased them, but there were objections raised by some of the Naval element that I read too fast, and that it was impossible to appreciate "chunks" of a poem hurled at them in the interval between a lecture on the Differential Calculus and one on the Organisation of the Army.

"We've come here to learn to fly," was the general opinion: "why should we waste our time in listening to chatter about totems, industrial unrest or the supposedly humorous character sketches in Chaucer?"

Their conversation among themselves began to run mainly on motor-bicycles and grievances against the Cranwell system.

They regarded me as a lunatic for continually drawing attention to the fact that they ought to regard themselves as extremely lucky in that they were pioneers: "The officer of the R.A.F.," I used to say, "has got to be a quite different product from an Army or a Naval officer. The time has passed when an officer could afford to narrow his interests down to his sport and his immediate job. You've got to cultivate a liberality of mind, a breadth of outlook, a tolerance and an all-pervading enthusiasm for every side of life at least as big as that of the head of a great business firm.

"When you are doing your other subjects you may keep your nose to the grindstone and follow where you are led: it is right that you should: in fact you'd find it dangerous to disagree with your flying instructors, but here in this room I want you to take a breather.

"If I had my way I should abolish all marks for this subject. The sole use of this subject, which we call English for want of a better name, is to develop your individuality if you have one, or to bring one to birth if you haven't. My scheme is this: I am going to lecture to you on the Art of Reading, the Art of Writing, the Art of Criticism, the Art of Speaking and the Art of Listening. This gives me the widest possible range. Anything that interests me I shall produce for discussion here in the hope that it will interest you.

"You will speak in here to get practice in the art of talking on any topic you like : you will deliver up once a week a piece of written work in verse or prose on any subject whether it has been mentioned in here or not. I would have you remember that you are men—many of you fought in the War—and that here at any rate we meet on equal terms. One thing only I shall find it hard to tolerate, and that is indifference.

"The so-called English that you did at school will, I fear, not be much use to you now : the English that you did to pass the Entrance Examination (Essay, Dictation, Précis, Reproduction and General Paper) has served its turn, and we shan't go back to it."

So I started. I cut articles out of *The Times*, *The New Statesman*, *The Nation*, *The Daily Herald*, every sort of paper and asked for criticisms of them. I read extracts from all sorts of authors, old and new to waken their interest. They yawned over Herrick and Keats, Milton and Shelley, but they laughed uproariously over A. A. Milne, "Saki," G. K. Chesterton and A. P. Herbert. They tried to listen to an exposition of the Theory of Relativity, but they were bored by Omar Khayyam. My worst failure was with Shakespeare. I tried by every means in my power to get them to appreciate any play . . . and all I got was a string of essays accusing him of being long-winded, boring, immoral, false to life, out of date, too poetic, and I know not what besides. You may say that it was no mean achievement to get these Cadets to express their honest opinion. It was about all I did get.

Their writing was slovenly, their spelling unbelievably bad, their arrangement non-existent, their structure of sentences like a bombed row of cottages, their choice of words more limited than that of a city clerk. I was sacrificing everything in order to get them to express themselves, and to rouse them to some sort of interest. Three times I endeavoured to tackle the problem of getting them to realise the greatness of Shakespeare, by a wholly different method each time, and each time I failed absolutely.

I soon perceived that I should have to leave out any idea of getting them to appreciate the great English writers in the way that every Frenchman appreciates his native authors, and cutting my losses on every side I concentrated on contemporary writers who were at any rate better than the sort that they had recourse to when left to choose for themselves. They had to be taught how to read, and even when they evinced any desire to pick up a book there was no book for them.

I took up to my lecture-hut upwards of three hundred of my favourite authors from my own small but very precious library : they took them away and lost them. I didn't so much mind the financial expense, though that was considerable, but I hated to lose a book full of marginal references, with important passages underlined, a first edition or one that was out of print.

Yet, what was I to do ? Nobody could go on lecturing interminably about engines if his pupils had no access to workshops : even the science instructor after a frightful struggle did secure a sort of laboratory. I alone was expected to go on talking about books, giving Cadets a taste for literature when there was no possibility of their exercising that taste. I was keen on my job : when any Cadet evinced any desire to read a particular book it was up to me to see that he had a copy.

This of course was the result of the Air Ministry controlling the College : everything that was done at Cranwell had to be referred to the Air Ministry for sanction and approval.

I had two months without any paper for the Cadets to write on, and then ten months during which I was supplied with paper that no one could write on.

As soon as ever the College started innumerable committees were formed. I remember an election of officers for the Cadet College Magazine : I was made Editor-in-Chief and had not less than twenty subordinates. Only one of these ever did anything whatever.

There was a Debating Society formed of which I was supposed to be the presiding genius : we met on alternate Sundays, first to a compulsory audience of the whole

College, then to fewer and fewer until it died. The Cadets did not want to discuss serious subjects.

There was a Dramatic Society: we read *The Ware Case*, and met with some lukewarm applause: later we had a triple bill which fell completely flat and that also died.

The Padre started an Endaba, a series of religious discussions, and got eminent churchmen down to open debates: if six Cadets attended we were lucky.

This apathy was certainly not due to Cranwell. It would be hard to imagine a place more suitable for a college of this sort. There is no more bracing, healthy climate in England. It was partly due to the type of Cadet we began with. It was opened long before the public knew anything about it. The Air Ministry had not taken the trouble to send round officer-lecturers to the Public Schools to explain why the best sort of boy should take up the R.A.F. as a career.

Consequently we had to take any material we could get, and to me at any rate it was little short of marvellous that we got as many good fellows as we did. I had lived among eighteen-year-olds for twelve years, and I have never known a more delightful type than some of these Cadets: on the other hand I have never come across a duller, more conventional or more listless type than some others. They varied more than any collection of men I have ever met. But the system was against us. The methods of the barrack-square were carried into every department of our lives.

One of the great difficulties about life at Cranwell was the question of transport. The Air Ministry had definitely promised that I should have full facilities for transport whenever I wanted them. Consequently I was luckier than most of the others. I had a large Crossley touring car at my disposal, and a driver who was willing to do anything for me. But there were unavoidable delays. I never had to give more than a dozen lectures a week, but I was late for nearly every one of these. Some I missed altogether. You could never tell what would be

wrong with the cars, but you could be quite sure that something would be. I was involved in not less than thirty accidents during my year at Cranwell in Air Force cars. Then after my hour's lecture of the morning was over I would go to the Mess and wait to be taken home. "In five minutes, sir," was the invariable reply over the 'phone. It was sometimes three hours. It is possible to exhaust the pleasures of any Mess within three hours if you have it to yourself. I used to read every word of all the papers from *The Tatler* down to the technical aeronautical journals. Nobody seemed to imagine that it could possibly matter that I should be kept waiting for however long a space of time. I think that this is my only really great accusation against the Army system.

There were officers attached at Cranwell who never had a moment's respite from masses of clerical work from the time they got up till the time they went to bed except at meal-times. There were other officers who attended one parade in the day for thirty minutes and then "stood by" waiting for something to do for weeks.

The truth is that for many people there was no whole-time job. I, for instance, never pretended that my work at the Cadet College filled up a quarter of my working hours. What did irritate me was that getting to and from my lecture occupied about half the day.

There would be, for instance, a Conference of Instructors convened at 8.30 a.m. All instructors were forced to attend, though in nearly every conference that I remember most of the instructors were not called upon to do more than go to sleep.

The kind of thing we discussed was this: "Could you tell me, sir, the difference between Tuition in Aviation and Tuition in Flying?" Then a long debate would follow. In the end some intelligent instructor would submit that one was done on the ground and the other in the air.

We rearranged the scheme of work about once a week. Everybody always wanted to have more hours or less in his subject and at a different time of day from that allotted to him. Then there would be a row about

preparation. The science man would object that the Cadets were reading novels for me, when they ought to be doing problems in mechanics. Could not there be special hours for English "prep" and special hours for "maths"? Then I would object that so long as I got my weekly essay I didn't mind when they read or wrote. The meteorology expert, a great and wise enthusiast, would then complain that his subject was not taken seriously enough on the ground that so few marks were given to it. Another instructor wanted to know why Cadets went to the dentist during his lecture hour, and so it would go on, much talking, little done.

Coming out of this at 9.30 I would have to wait perhaps till noon before my lecture was due. I would try to settle down to write, but writing requires constant reference and my books were either lost or at home. I used to go round and hear other men lecture. The guiding principle appeared to be that of making the Cadet take down stereotyped notes: afterwards he would copy them out in different coloured inks. Now note-taking is a subject on which I feel very strongly. Dictated notes serve no purpose whatever. Notes taken at random mean that quite half the lecture is lost: the only sort of note-taking that has any value is that in which the lecturer stops talking after forty-five minutes and gives his audience fifteen minutes to get the gist of his remarks down and then goes round to have a look at them. This requires some mental ability among the pupils, which was more than most of the Cadets happened to have. I never allowed any Cadet to take any notes whatever on my lectures.

Somehow the morning would pass, and I would give my noontide lecture. In point of fact the Cadets might be a quarter of an hour late. I would then talk rapidly for three-quarters of an hour on "Jargon," "Style," "Humour," or "Max Beerbohm," while some few would try to follow, while the rest looked bored or went to sleep until perhaps the Commandant would look in, when I had to call the class to attention and wait for his word to carry on.

I encouraged visitors. I took a good deal of trouble over my lectures to make them interesting, original and stimulating. There is nothing I liked doing so well, but I disliked being interrupted. People might come in quietly and sit down, but to distract the attention of a whole class by making them stand up seemed to me to be absurd. Often officers would come in, not to listen, but to find out some quite trivial thing, an orderly would come in with buckets of coal, a sergeant with orders. It was rarely that I got an uninterrupted hour.

At one o'clock I would go back to the Mess for lunch, always a cheery meal. There would be about a hundred young officers, about the best collection of men I have ever met, always glad to see one, full of badinage and pleasant conversation. There was always plenty of food and drink. After lunch they would fade away to parades and work while I chafed at my belated transport—I might get home by 2.30 or 3 and then have to start back at 4 for my one hour's lecture in the evening, after which I might have to wait till 7.30 to get home. A curious waste of a day to give two hours' lectures, and quite as tiring as any day in the City.

Sometimes I would stay up in the afternoon and play games, which meant that I had to throw myself on the mercy of some unmarried officer and use his hut to change in.

I could never quite reconcile myself to this hut existence. It seems to me absurd that a man of thirty, quite likely a man of taste, should be compelled to live in one room, abominably furnished: a well-educated man of that age ought to have his own house, his own pictures, his own furniture, his own home comforts, his own library, his own servants. I liked Cranwell more than any place I have ever worked at, but I always had a comfortable home to come back to at night. I should have hated it if I had been compelled to live in the camp. However difficult the question of transport, whatever the weather or the state of the roads I made a point of getting home every night. I would have walked the ten miles each way rather than

have stayed in spite of the impenetrable fogs, the snow, the icy roads, the floods and other inconveniences.

When one considers that the Cadets were of undergraduate age it was amusing to read that "The post office is out of bounds to all Cadets," "No fires will be permitted in any quarters during the period, May 1st to September 30th," "Cadets may purchase half a pint of beer at lunch and one pint of beer at dinner . . . on guest nights, in addition to draught beer, Cadets may have one glass of port," "Visitors are not allowed in Cadets' quarters except with the written permission of the O.C. Squadron, and then only to look at the quarters."

I had no quarrel with any of these rules. I merely point them out to show how curtailed was the liberty of a Flight-Cadet when compared with that of an Oxford or Cambridge undergraduate. On the other hand it was refreshing to learn that "Professors will not place a Cadet under arrest nor have any powers of awarding punishment." That put the educational expert in his place. My assistant instructor came back from leave on one occasion to find himself styled in the orders of the day as "Civilian Subordinate": the only other Civilian Subordinate deemed worthy of mention on the same day was a servant in the kitchen dismissed for pilfering.

The O.C. Squadron "must remember that his personal example and influence with the Cadets form a large part of the educational value of the College and that on the type of officer he turns out depends largely the future of the Royal Air Force." The Professor is not reminded that on him depends anything at all.

The Mess Rules of the Officers' Mess were a little staggering to civilians accustomed to express their opinion freely in a free country. "Officers are not to make remarks on orders in the Mess or ante-room."

"No unmarried officer, except a widower with children shall be a non-resident."

"Matches will not be used at dinner." "General

discussions on politics, or religion, or in which ladies' names are mentioned, are forbidden within the Mess." And yet we were supposed to encourage outside interests. Add "shop" and sports to that list and what is left, except one's ailments and food?

The most ambitious work that I undertook during my year at Cranwell was the control of the magazine. The Air Ministry subsidised the first number to the extent of £100. Apart from months of labour it cost me well over £200 to produce my first effort, but owing to a good deal of canvassing I had managed to secure £80 of advertisements. No advertising agent would touch it. I first invited tenders by an "agony" column notice in *The Times*, to which I got no replies. I then got up a specimen page advertisement and sent it to three hundred shops and got no reply to that. I then called on a number of West End firms, and was on two occasions thrown out and treated somewhat brusquely by about twenty others. I pulled every string I knew, and in the end got eighteen pages at £5 a page. I then began to collect articles.

Winston Churchill and Lord Trenchard sent me a paragraph each, Sir Sefton Brancker, Lord Hugh Cecil, and Sir Philip Game sent me three very good articles, and officers at Cranwell supplied me with the rest, and a splendid "rest" it was too. No Cadet submitted a readable or feasible manuscript. Gale and Polden printed it, and I produced my first number in September and charged half a crown for it. The Cadets each bought one, and damned it out of hand as stodgy; they found too little about themselves in it. Most of the officers bought a copy and some praised it, others were indifferent. The general public naturally enough wouldn't touch it. I then sent it all over the place as propaganda, to all the London Clubs, to all the Public Schools, to various Messes, round the Air Ministry, to all Air Stations, and to every man of influence that I could think of. I hope it did good. It was a fresh-air venture, solid, full of articles on hunting, beagling, foreign travel, and so on.

It gave the Cadets something to write about at last : they went for me valiantly, and for three weeks my essays were well done : they criticised it with venom.

My second number was a sop to them : I got Heath Robinson, Beuttler, Stampa and Bateman to draw funny pictures for me, and gave the Cadets more news about themselves.

From start to finish I got no help at all. I had to bully every officer I knew day after day to write articles for me : those who did eventually submit manuscripts startled me by the excellence of their matter, but the Commandant took exception to a good deal of their work on grounds quite apart from their literary merits or shortcomings, so I was left to make my peace with them as well as I could. It was a valuable lesson for me : I learnt the art of bringing out a magazine from A to Z.

Among the other duties I undertook was the foundation of the Debating and Dramatic Society. We began well. Lord Hugh Cecil, a staunch adherent of our cause, and always willing to help, came down to show us how to speak on two occasions. The majority of the Cadets resented his speeches as dull and too long. In point of fact he was brilliant and incisive, but he taught them nothing because they were not interested. When we had dismally floundered through a variety of topics like the cruelty of bull-fighting, and poison-gas, a deputation of Cadets waited on me to suggest that the Debating Society could only flourish if officers were debarred from attending.

They wanted to run the show themselves. I was overjoyed. They tried : it degenerated into staccato backchat and a farce, and then died. We read a few plays with books in our hands, more or less dressed the part with as much action as we could, but only the performers really enjoyed that. The Cadets had got themselves into a state of dangerous apathy. They gave no entertainments, they did not want to debate, they were unwilling to enter into any discussion on religion or anything else. They only wanted to be left alone to "grouse" at the misery of their lot.

Every Tuesday night at 6.30 every officer on the Station had to attend a compulsory lecture. I was put down to talk to them on The Art of Reading, The Art of Writing, The Art of Speaking and Humour.

In those four lectures I pretty well epitomised all that I had done during the year with the Cadets, but the difference between my two audiences was amazing.

I never lectured to a set of people who were more alert or more anxious to imbibe fresh ideas than the officers, and I certainly have never lectured to people who were less anxious to imbibe anything at all than the Cadets.

Did I recommend a book? There came up at the end of my talk a crowd of officers to borrow it or to hear more about it, and these, remember, were men whose education was complete years ago: University graduates, Sandhurst and Woolwich men, old naval officers. I looked forward to my Tuesday nights as much as I looked forward to our "rugger" matches or hunting meets.

I don't think that I can better show the scope of my attempt to teach these Cadets English than by printing a copy of the paper that I suggested as suitable for a passing-out test.

It was not used, but the second paper I here append was used. It was set by Professor Sir Walter Raleigh.

MY EXPERIMENTAL PASSING-OUT TEST PAPER

Time allowed three hours.

Not more than *four* or less than *three* questions are to be attempted.

1. How far do you consider Reading to be a necessity in life? Select *three* books that have definitely affected your outlook or your habits and state exactly how you have been affected by them.
2. Draw up a scheme for a magazine to be called *The Royal Air Force Review* to appeal primarily to all officers in the Royal Air Force. State precisely why you would or would not include articles of general interest.

3. "It is not enough to enjoy oneself: a man must be able to analyse his reasons for enjoyment." How far do you agree with this in the realms of one or all of the following: Sport, poetry, music, drama, painting?
4. "Poetry is essentially emotional, prose is essentially intellectual."

If this is true it means that quite different standards of criticism are necessary in judging the two. What qualities do you look for in poetry and what qualities do you demand from good prose?

5. Compose a dialogue between two men one of whom sees the highest form of self-expression in oratory, the other in writing. Each strives to convert the other to his way of thinking. Stress *through their talk* the quite different personalities of the two speakers.
6. "If these classics weren't shoved down pupils' throats the adult population of this country would be sitting of an evening reading and enjoying Milton instead of *John Bull*."

Do you believe this? How do you propose to cultivate good taste in any mental, moral, physical or spiritual food? Is a cultivated taste worth having?

ROYAL AIR FORCE (CADET) COLLEGE

Marks: 4th Term Cadets 200.

2nd Term Cadets 400.

DECEMBER, 1920

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

3 hours.

1. Write very brief accounts of:
 - A good essay
 - A good poem
 - A good story
 amongst those that you have read; and say why you think each of them good.

2. Explain for the benefit of someone who has never seen an aeroplane, what it is, and how it flies. Do this in simple language, without the use of technical terms.
3. When poetry is unrhymed, how is it different from prose? Illustrate your answer by quotation, if you can.
4. Write a short life of any one great English author and a short account of his work.
5. Write a conversation between a Royal Air Force officer, taken prisoner by the Germans, and an English-speaking German officer who comes into the prison to ask him questions.
6. Explain the meaning of the following terms: Epigram, Metaphor, Maxim, Fable, Epilogue, Elegy. Give examples of the three first.
7. Who were the following, and why are they famous? Francis Drake, William Pitt, George Gordon, Lord Byron, Charles George Gordon, Abraham Lincoln, Wilbur Wright.
8. Re-write the following sentences, putting them into plain, good, clear, English.
 - i. In the case of the hippopotamus the animal is large.
 - ii. The importation of a billiard table constitutes a considerable addition to the resources of the Club.
 - iii. Prisoner at the bar, God has given you health and strength, instead of which you go about stealing ducks.
 - iv. If I am not mistaken, the year 1914 will have to be referred back to for several generations to come as an epoch commencing much in European history.
 - v. Dr. Johnson sat in his easy chair, and drank tea, and dictated to the literary world, and for fifty years he kept his position.
 - vi. My brethren, we are met here for no earthly purpose.
 - vii. The rattle of firearms is looming in the distance.

- viii. Over and above the mission going on in this house a whole family lives underground.
- ix. Please excuse my absence yesterday, as I was consulting a doctor for insomnia during the class hour.
- x. Mr. A. presents his compliments to Mr. B. I have got a hat which is not his ; if he has got a hat which is not yours, no doubt they are the ones.

And here is a sample of an Essay shown up to me by a Cadet.

To S. P. B. MAIS, ESQ.

“ N.B. I’ve put in a good deal of hard thinking before sending in this effusion, but I finally decided to do so. The fact that decided me was that you think nothing of marks, and so you won’t think I’m out for a final hundred. Also I think the marks will probably be in by now, so that will be quite all right. As long as you don’t think I’m out for a ‘ mark crawl ’ or anything if that sort I’ll be quite contented.

“ N. H. D’AETH.”

“ This is—I hope at any rate—the last essay that I’ll show up at Cranwell. Under these circumstances I think the best thing to write about is the good that English has done me here. In the first place I want to make it quite plain that this isn’t written for marks—even supposing it was I expect it would be too late to get them in.

“ Well, in the first place the English periods themselves ; what good have they been ? I came straight here from a mine-sweeping drifter, after 18 months of what was probably the most trying game it was possible to partake in. For the whole of that time I was in command, and on the whole it wasn’t a game calculated to rest the brain and nervous system. For the three days a week that we were at sea I never turned in. When I came here, after a short leave of eight

days I was still pretty thoroughly brain-weary, and the long day of a fixed and monotonous routine didn't tend to rest me. And yet there were always two subjects I always looked forward to ; one was flying, and the other English. The reason for the flying is obvious—why should I have joined the R.A.F. otherwise ? The English may be a bit more obscure to some people. I always went in with one fixed idea in my head. That was to take in, discuss, and think about new ideas ; broaden, and above all, rest my brain. The idea worked admirably, as I found out. After that hour—like flying, all too short—I could attack my work again without that dull, vacant, ' it's-got-to-be-done ' sort of feeling. Then afterwards, when we did get a short time to ourselves, it gave me something to think about and—but that belongs to para. two.

“ Now we come on to what good the subject has actually done. Of course the chief thing it was intended to do, and has achieved in my case, was and is to broaden the pupils' whole aspect on life in general. I used to have my own ideas, and stick to them, and nothing on this earth would have induced me to change ; in fact I wouldn't even listen to the other side of the argument. I'm very much the same now, except that I'm always ready to listen to any arguments put forward by the other side ; above all, if I see I've been wrong, I'm not so big a fool that I won't change my opinion.

“ Then we come on to literature. I'm afraid that in my case, as in every other, you've failed to make me appreciate Shakespeare ; but I'm always ready to change my mind on even that point. I keep his three books handy, and sometimes look at them. Some day I may like them, but I think I'm too young to do so yet. Otherwise, the course has been a complete success. Before I came here I would never read a book unless I knew the author by name, and knew his books and style well. I'm very much the same now, but I've come across so many names in the year here, and they have been read in such a way that I'm quite ready

to read any of them. In fact it broadened my literary resources by more than 100 per cent. Here's just one instance. I went down to town last week-end without any too much money in my pocket (as usual !). At the bookstall at Grantham station I noticed one copy of *Right Royal*. Well, that had been read to us, or at least enough to make me want to read more, and so out came the vast sum of six shillings, and I now am the only cadet here with a copy of that book—and, though I only had sixpence and a few odd coppers when I got back, I didn't regret having bought the book. Before I came here I'd never even heard of Masefield. As for S. P. B. Mais' books, I've never read any of them but I'm going to—out of sheer curiosity. Even after the man at the bookstall at King's Cross said he never wanted to read another of them.

“ That's about all about literature, and now we come on to writing. I know far better than you how much it has improved. Probably you've never seen the best that I can do, because I'm generally out to get as much done in as short a time as possible. The way I can tell is by my letters home—and to other people—and the cost of writing paper. Originally they were merely looked on as a method of telling that I was alive. Now they are looked on as a method of getting news. Points are jumped on and discussed, and if I forget to write about six pages of abuse arrive within a week. That's just one small detail. Now, when I want to write I can sit down and burble for eight pages ; before, two pages was a maximum, and that was a strain. I think that's because I expect people to take the same open-minded view of life as I do, and so don't mind putting down my ideas.

“ And now on to the method of teaching English used here. At first it seemed that there was none, but I soon changed my mind on that point. In fact, as soon as I realized that my letter writing was improving. The whole subject is made interesting in the first place, and of course that is almost the whole battle. At

Osborne and Dartmouth it bored me stiff till one, G. N. Pocock, came along and made it interesting. He it was who taught me what little drawing I can do, and it was he who made me realize that it could be an interesting subject. I wasn't with him long enough to gain much knowledge. I haven't been here a year, but that's been long enough. (That's not meant to be rude!) Finally, I think I have learnt more in English since I've been here than in any other subject—except Flying—and it will be far more use to me than any of them, perhaps including flying.

“And so ends my last essay here, and I take the opportunity to wish you, and your books, and the College Mag. a long life, and the best of luck. I hope that your wandering lectures will do others as much good as I think they've done me, and that the well-known personality 'Peter' will be one of the everyday features of the Cranwell scenery when I come here as an instructor.”

The academic year at Cranwell is divided into two terms, from February to August and from September to the end of December: there is a short break at Easter.

When one considers that the University term is eight weeks and that a Cadets' term may be eighteen weeks, one does not altogether wonder if they get stale towards the end of a “half.” Whatever the primary cause there is no question that tempers were very short and relations much strained long before the end of the first year. There had been 52 Cadets for the first six months: the number was increased to 87 for the latter half of the year. The second entry were rather lower in their standard of ability than the first.

We were all kept going at the end by the thought of the long-promised Cadets' Dance which was to take place after Winston Churchill's Inspection, when everything was over and we could all rest in peace for seven weeks. The wives had all worked hard to give the sisters of Cadets a good time. We all “put up” as many as our

houses would hold for the week-end and all our worries were at an end.

Reviewing the year as I did to myself on that last night at the dance I found that I was genuinely sorry that it was over and hoped for a better show in the second year. After all we had to surmount incredible difficulties in starting the place at all : I was glad the Naval Cadets were passing out. They were good sportsmen and I liked them very much individually, but collectively they were narrow-minded ; they preserved an old tradition : they did nothing to start a new one. They had licked their juniors into shape well, but I was glad that they were going. I saw very little of them in class, and I always liked them to criticise my methods, which they did freely. We were most friendly, considering how divergent were our points of view. With several of the "second termers" I had made fast friends. There were cadets amongst them who were the salt of the earth, and I knew them best of all. I hated the idea that they would ever have to leave. For the most part they were unhappy under the restrictions from which they suffered. They genuinely hated the life. They had come to Cranwell to fly and they had flown, some for ten minutes, some for forty minutes in six months. They let go sometimes on paper to relieve their feelings : it did them good, and no one else any harm.

Of the first term I knew very little : they seemed to me to be childish, and rather dull on the whole. There were bright exceptions. At any rate I hoped the Christmas leave, a very long one, would put them all right, and I bade them farewell with a light heart.

At ten o'clock the next day I was summoned to the Commandant's office and given an envelope. On opening it I found three or four essays of the Cadets that had been shown up to me, and with it an accompanying note from the Commandant asking whether I had encouraged the Cadets to criticise the system, or to write on moral topics, why I had not submitted the enclosed essays to him, and a lot more questions which seemed to me irrelevant.

For the first minute or so I merely laughed to myself, and wished that the Commandant had not gone out hunting so that I might explain. He seemed to be worried about something. I had kept every essay that every Cadet had ever written for me (over twelve hundred in number) in my hut : some queer-minded soul must have routed round until he found something he didn't like, and then taken his find to the Commandant. It was the officer who invigilated an examination in my hut at the end of term. Perhaps having nothing to do, like most invigilators, he merely investigated what he could find for amusement. Many people have suggested to me that he was a private enemy of mine, bent on my destruction. I find it hard to believe this. There was no officer at Cranwell who had not been the soul of kindness to me : he must have been merely acting from a sense of duty, but I do not know by what right a man is allowed to steal papers from another man's hut.

However, when I found out that I was expected to reply I went home, and wrote the following letter to the Commandant :

“ SIR,

“ In reply to your letter I have the honour to submit the following points.

“ (1) All Essays shown up to me are informal and are treated rather in the nature of private letters than compositions meant for the public eye : over the sentiments expressed therein it would therefore be hard to take disciplinary action.

“ Essays marked A. (1) Criticism of the College has never been encouraged in lectures to Cadets but criticism in general is a part of all humane studies, and several Cadets have proceeded on their own initiative from criticisms of books to a criticism (in the main foolish) of their own lives and their attitude to life. Criticism of their own circumstances is of course a frequent topic of conversation in the Mess : to express on paper in an informal manner what they talk about among themselves is in some cases the only

thing they can discuss with any readiness. Such criticism serves no purpose and is meant to serve no purpose other than practice in composition: the sentiments are usually worthless, and I let the Cadets know it.

“(2) The grievances put forward are not intended to be taken seriously. Had the person who stole these papers from my hut only taken the trouble to read all the rest he would have seen the statement ‘these remarks are not intended to be taken seriously’—a statement which need scarcely have been made in many cases, so palpably absurd were the issues raised.

“(3) These Essays were not brought to your notice for the reasons stated above. Had they called for any action I should certainly have taken the obvious steps: when the Cadets criticised the Debating Society and the Magazine adversely you saw them and raised no protest but treated their remarks as humorous.

“B. (1) I did not set ‘The Immorality of the Stage’ or ‘Immorality’ as subjects: Cadets are allowed to write on any subject—and these were the outcome of a lecture on a general History of the Drama, in the course of which one Cadet raised the point that he objected to Shakespeare on the ground that he was immoral. Such an idea had to be combated immediately and led to a general discussion on current ideas on the Immorality of the Stage.

“I detest the ignorant attitude of those who would cast aspersions on an honourable profession, and it is certainly part of the duties of a lecturer in English Language and Literature to inculcate a healthier attitude to life than is apparently adopted by young men of the Cadets’ age.

“As a result of open and free discussion it is probable that Cadets may become healthier in mind than they would be if left to accept unreasonable beliefs by themselves.

“(2) These Essays were not brought to your notice because it would be impossible to treat the arguments adduced in these Essays as more than a humorous pose.

“To anyone who knows Cadet Y—— such a farrago of nonsense as is produced in his essay simply called for five minutes’ straight talk—which he got. He himself realised the idiocy underlying what he wrote. Under-officer Drabble confessed that he was writing with his tongue in his cheek.

“To sum up : it would appear that my intellectual honesty is being called in question. This is a very grave accusation and one that would be dismissed by anyone who knew me well. The only fair method of realising the truth would be to test the characters of all those over whom I exert influence and see which way that influence tends.

“The office of Professor of English is supposed to carry with it several most important functions, not least that of guiding Cadets towards liberality of mind and breadth of outlook, a difficult but very necessary task calling for the exercise of considerable tact and judgment. My defence is that by allowing Cadets to ventilate their very childish views on any subject the professor sometimes penetrates through to their real personalities and can foster a saner and cleaner habit of mind than they would possess if left to themselves. In the process of doing this it is obvious that much that is cheap and nasty will come to the surface, but to take steps to punish a youth for exhibiting the vacuity of his mind in these informal efforts at self-expression would destroy all chance of ever getting him to say anything.

“I am, Sir, completely under your jurisdiction : you have heard my lectures frequently and offered no comment of a derogatory nature. My lecture room has been open to you at all hours and I welcomed your visits. I should have been happier if you could have found time to listen to more of my discourses, for you would then have had no reason to doubt my honesty. You would have seen how these Essays came to be written and how I treated the sentiments expressed therein.

“It astounds me that any invigilator finding nothing

better to do than to read private papers found in my room should discover in them serious treasonable matter and, without giving me a chance of explaining what they really were, should submit them to you for official action unless he were spurred on by personal animosity.

“Of what precisely do I stand accused?”

“Is it as standard-bearer of heterodox and dangerous doctrines? If so, I should scarcely be such a fool as to leave the results of my pernicious teaching lying about.

“Is it merely stupidity? That by accident in an endeavour to do good I do harm? That can only be judged by results.

“You, Sir, ought to know as well as anyone what I stand for in my teaching.

“These boys are close to manhood: many of them fought in the War. I try to treat them as reasonable men, capable of making up their minds on the issues that matter.

They find it hard to concentrate all the time on masterpieces of literature, and after all literature cannot be divorced from life. One wants them to become sane, thoughtful citizens. To make them so, one has to cut away a good deal of dross: to call this up and disperse it by argument seems to me a fundamental point in Education. I had prided myself on the fact that they had begun to have the glimmering of a sense of humour: they were beginning to learn not to take themselves so seriously. Unfortunately the finder of these Essays chose to take them much more seriously than they take themselves. These essays, wrested out of their proper context, are made to sound as if they were the final expression of serious opinion.

“I have the honour to be, Sir,

“Your obedient Servant,

“S. P. B. MAIS,

“Professor of English.

“PS.—It may be worth noting in passing that the marks given are *not* for opinions expressed but for the industry entailed in their composition.”

Having copied the letter out I went back to Cranwell and waited for the Commandant to return from hunting.

My chief grudge against him at the time was that he had spoilt my chance of a day's hunting, but hadn't allowed my affairs to interfere with his sport. I handed him the letter without a word and waited while he read it.

He was more or less inarticulate when he had finished it, but the gist of his remarks (he made very few) ran more or less as follows: “These essays were brought to me last Thursday—December the sixteenth. I sent for you—but you had gone to London——”

“To lecture, sir. I always go up on Fridays—you gave me leave about a year ago——” There was an uncomfortable silence which I broke.

“Well, what's going to happen, sir?” I asked. “Shall I go and see the Air Council?”

“They'll probably send for you.”

“I hope they will,” I said. “I could go on talking about those essays for ever.”

“I am very sorry about all this,” he said. “You've been invaluable to us in the games.”

Good Lord! I thought. He obviously thinks I'm going to be sacked.

I left shortly after this, and went home to entertain the large party we had invited for Christmas.

I remember shaking myself in the car to make myself believe it. Only yesterday I had thought of myself as deeply rooted at Cranwell for ever. I loved the life: I loved the country-side: I loved the manor house where I lived: I loved the cheery friendliness of the officers. It was ridiculous to think that I could be made to suffer when I had committed no crime.

We had a good Christmas, and I got some splendid days after the fox on foot.

It was on the 29th (eight days afterwards) that the Assistant-Commandant came up to me in Sleaford market-place while we were waiting for the pack to draw off.

"Mais," he said, "it's come. The Air Council have called on you to resign: I'm awfully sorry."

Cold shivers went down my spine.

"It's preposterous," I said. "I haven't even seen them yet."

"The letter's waiting for you at your house now," he said.

I wasn't going to let it spoil my day's hunting. I had the day of my life. We had a fierce thirty-five-minute run after our first fox and killed him, and then got on to another at once and ran him till 4.30 in blinding rain. I arrived home to find the following letter waiting for me:

"SIR,

"1. I am commanded by the Air Council to inform you that certain aspects of the instruction lately given to the Cadets at the R.A.F. College, Cranwell, were brought to their notice by the Air Officer Commanding.

"2. The Council viewed with considerable apprehension the type and method of instruction disclosed and in consequence instructed the A.O.C. to call for your explanation, which they have now received.

"3. This explanation has been carefully considered by the Air Council, who are forced to the conclusion that you have adopted methods of instruction which cannot be justified even by the widest interpretation of the duties entrusted to you, and which are not compatible with the ordinary obligations binding on a member of the teaching profession. Some of these methods were moreover, in their opinion, peculiarly unsuitable to an Officers' Training Establishment such as Cranwell.

"4. I am to say therefore that the Council regret that they have no option but to call upon you to resign your appointment, such resignation to take

effect as terminating your connection with the College before the commencement of the next term.

“ I am, sir,

“ Your obedient servant,

W. F. NICHOLSON.”

The Commandant had gone away on leave. I couldn't get any help from him. He had said at our fateful interview : “ I am sure that whatever you did you did from the best of motives.”

As a matter of fact that was the last word we ever exchanged on the subject.

This letter made me realise that I was in for a serious fight. I wrote immediately to Winston Churchill to demand an interview with the Air Council, and received a telegram from Lord Londonderry telling me to appear at the Air Ministry on Monday afternoon the 3rd of January.

In the interim I wrote to Lord Hugh Cecil, Wedgwood Benn, the President of the Board of Education, Churchill's secretaries, and other friends of mine to do what they could.

On the way to see Lord Londonderry I called in at the Garrick Club to see George Mair, who roared with laughter over the affair and gave me a note to General Sir Frederick Sykes. At 4.30 I was ushered into Lord Londonderry's presence. This was the first time that I had met him. He struck me as dull, and honest, but quite incapable of taking the trouble to understand me or what I stood for.

Before ever I laid my scheme of defence before him he told me that Winston Churchill had made up his mind that I must go, and that was all there was about it. I began my defence.

First I pointed out that the essays in question were not public but informal exercises meant for my eye alone.

Secondly, that I had hauled the Cadets over the coals for grouching at their lot instead of coming out and extracting all the good they could get out of Cranwell.



Jill, Lalage and I at Shoreham



(Above) *Lalage and I at Woolacombe*
(Below) *Jill and Lalage at Woolacombe*

No Cadet in his wildest moment of exaggeration would ever dare to suggest that I had ever derided discipline.

Thirdly, that I looked upon it as my duty not to let a foolish theory about loose morality pass unchallenged: the Cadet who had written on this subject had come to me privately afterwards and apologised for the line he had taken. "I did not mean you to take it seriously, sir," he said. I hadn't: I had only based a sermon on it.

Fourthly, that I was an Educational Expert and I demanded to be tried by my peers, the Minister for Education, not by Winston Churchill, who knew nothing whatever about educational theories.

Fifthly, that the Commandant had apologised to me for sending my private papers to the Air Council without consulting me first.

Sixthly, that the Air Council could not override the unanimous testimony of all Cadets, all officers and all the members of my profession who knew me, every one of whom would be prepared to testify to the soundness of my views and my methods.

Seventhly, I called attention to the work I had done on Lord Hugh Cecil's Committee, the testimonials I had received from countless pupils, dons, headmasters and educationists of all sorts, and the essay printed in this chapter that by good fortune had escaped the fate of the others as it was given up late.

Eighthly, I ventured to depict what effect my originality of method had upon the Cadets.

Ninthly, I sketched the duties of a professor as I saw them, that he should teach the Cadets to express themselves—to do this the professor must, I said, know the Cadets personally: they must learn that he is a sort of safety-valve for them, that they can, within limits, say what they like to him: he is there to teach them to enjoy life: he has by his example to show them the joy of physical and mental energy. To do this he requires tact, sympathy, patience and judgment, and must be given an absolutely free hand.

Tenthly, I pointed out what the Air Council proposed to do, for no crime that could be proved against me, I

was to be turned out at a moment's notice when there were unemployed in hundreds of thousands everywhere. Before even there had been time to test my methods I was to leave a job that I had given up everything to undertake. In going to Cranwell I had incurred very heavy liabilities which I certainly could not face, I had my wife (always delicate) now utterly broken up with apprehension of the difficult times ahead, and my children would in a very short time be starving as I had no reserve funds. I was living up to the hilt of my income.

Eleventhly, out of 1200 essays stolen from my hut (they had cleared out the whole lot) none of the ordinary types of essays had been submitted to the Air Council, only four or five peculiarly futile ones from a peculiarly bad type of Cadet.

Twelfthly, that the R.A.F. Cadet College had no justification for its existence if it did not differ in essentials from Sandhurst and Woolwich. It was only an extra unnecessary burden on the tax-payer's pocket. Neither Sandhurst nor Woolwich seeks to give its Cadets a general sense of culture. It is the crowning glory of Cranwell that it seeks to provide a general education. You can't do this on stereotyped lines.

Thirteenthly, only a man of strong individuality can hope to make anything of his job as Professor of English. You will never get a man of personality to take on a job when he hears that he is liable to be removed without any warning through the unconsidered caprice of a politician. The only type of man who will accept office and kow-tow to your authority will be the useless machine-made type.

Fourteenthly, the aim of our Education is Discipline combined with freedom of thought. By your treatment of me you sound the death-knell of free-thought. No Cadet will ever dare to say what he means again.

Fifteenthly, I sketched what I had done with the Cadets, how I had got them to read Jorrocks, Masfield, Beerbohm, Chesterton, Milne, Herbert and "Saki" as a preliminary to deeper authors, how I had got them to write reports, letters, dialogues, criticisms, how I had

got them to argue in class, how I had achieved even expressions of completely honest and clear thinking in some instances, how I had tried to cultivate their good taste and wake them up to the value of cultivating their imagination, their sense of beauty, their sense of observation and their sense of enjoyment.

I might have gone on for ever: Lord Londonderry sat there tapping a sheet of essays with a pencil, looking bored and sceptical.

"The fact remains that you have allowed these boys to express themselves in a dreadful manner, and I for my part should be horrified to think that a son of mine could come under such an influence."

He hadn't understood a word that I said: he hadn't tried to.

"I don't think any purpose is being served by protracting this interview," he said, and he bowed me from the room. He had made up his mind before I entered it that nothing that I could say would matter. Winston Churchill had made up his mind and the way of least resistance was safest for his minions. It was a new thing for me to find that men are afraid of one another: I had an idea that all men of honour did what they thought to be the right and fair thing without a second thought as to the consequence to themselves.

I went home. I had however before this had the privilege of seeing General Seely, who was quite extraordinarily kind about the whole affair. I wrote the following letter to Lord Londonderry on my return:

"DEAR LORD LONDONDERRY,

"As the responsibility for calling upon me to resign rests with the whole Air Council I should be very much obliged if you would allow me to state fully my position in person to them.

"It was good of you to grant me a private interview, but I could wish that I had then been able to give you a full statement rather than a few points.

"I am, I think, justified in asking for an interview with the whole of the Air Council to whom I am

prepared to shew in detail why the methods of instruction that I adopt are most definitely not only compatible with the obligations binding on any honourable member of my profession but incumbent upon any Educationist who is responsible for the formation of character and the inculcation of general culture.

“Yours sincerely,

S. P. B. MAIS.”

On the 8th of January I received the last letter I ever got from the Air Ministry.

“SIR,

“With reference to your letter of the 29th ult. and to the interview which you had with the Under-Secretary of State for Air on the 3rd instant, I am commanded by the Air Council to state that they understand that you are unwilling to resign your appointment as requested in my letter of the 24th ult.

“In these circumstances the Council regret that they are now compelled to notify you that the appointment you hold as Professor of English at the R.A.F. Cadet College, Cranwell, is terminated as from this date.

“The Council recognise that you were entitled, under the terms of your appointment, to expect in normal circumstances six months’ notice of the termination of your appointment. Although the circumstances are not normal, and although it cannot be admitted that legally you have any right to payment in lieu of notice, the Council propose nevertheless to make you a payment of £400, equal to six months’ salary, over and above your salary up to this date, and a draft for this amount will be forwarded to you in due course.

“I am, Sir,

“Your obedient Servant,

“W. F. NICHOLSON.”

I got into touch with all the influential people I know, but I found that one and all advised me not to fight the case as Churchill was omnipotent, ruthless and inhuman.

I was finally decided by Lord Hugh Cecil. It was as a member of his Committee that I first began to spend myself in the service of the Royal Air Force, it seemed only right that I should bow to his opinion when severing my connection with the service I had tried to serve.

His advice was : "Don't fight : get the best terms you can, and go elsewhere. You can't fight a Government Department."

Perhaps the most ironic feature of the whole business was that I was asked by the Air Ministry to find my successor, "someone safe who won't try experiments as you did."

He is still there.

Chapter VII

THE "DAILY EXPRESS," 1921-1923

THE change from Cranwell to Fleet Street was, apart from the considerably higher salary, which was given me in cash in an envelope every Friday night instead of by cheque monthly as it had been in the R.A.F., mainly one of tempo.

The *Daily Express* was rightly named. At Cranwell we seemed to have all time on our hands to mould the character of the slowly developing Royal Air Force Cadet. On the *Daily Express* we had to remake the world every day. It was very strenuous, it was great fun, and it was a world with which my cloistered virtues and academic mind had up to that time never come into contact.

I am still not sure whether the world for which the editor of a two million circulation newspaper caters really exists at all outside his own imagination. If it does, some very strange things happen in it, for here is a casual selection of captions that I culled from a newspaper to whose staff I never had the good fortune to be attached :

"Bride Duped Him on Honeymoon—Then stole £500 Rings."

"Chained wife naked in cellar."

"All-Mouse Opera is His Ambition."

"Screaming Women chased by Pigs at Freak Ball."

"Horse Drinks Bride's Health in Champagne."

"Cut off Wife's Nose."

"Husband Spoke only Twice in Two Years, Says Wife."

"Her Beard Her Curse."

"Chained Widow Murdered in Express on Riviera."

"Wanted Every Inch of Bride's Body to be Tattooed."

"Garters Contest in a Church Hall."

These are the starred features or leading news-items of this newspaper. Obviously the definition that "news is when man bites dog" still goes in certain types of journal. The object would appear to be less the dissemination of information than the rigid selection of only such items as will entertain the lovers of the fantastic and unusual. There is of course a defence for this.

The bald record that we read so often in provincial newspapers that the "Annual Whist Drive was well attended and a musical programme was rendered by Mr. Tom Bowling and Miss Annie Laurie and received with applause," is only read by Tom Bowling and Annie Laurie who like to see their names in print, and by the committee responsible for the Whist Drive who are furious because their names have been omitted. The editor responsible for keeping up and increasing against unceasing competition the circulation of a popular paper has to be continually thinking out new schemes to seize the attention of new clients and to hold the loyalty of old ones.

I have often envied a headmaster his job. The only accident he has to fear is an epidemic. I never envied an editor his responsibility, for he stands each day the chance of committing some irretrievable error, of missing altogether the most important "story" of the day, or of selecting for his "lead story" some completely unimportant item of news. He is in some ways like his own racing correspondent, compelled day after day to tip certain winners. Luckily both for the editor and the tipster "to-morrow is another day," and the memory of the public is mercifully short.

All newspapers have in their time backed the wrong horse. They are not so tactless as to call their readers' attention to it, though their competitors occasionally indulge in a gleeful mischievous dig in the ribs at their expense.

The difference between my life in the R.A.F. and as a journalist was, as I said, mainly one of tempo. I had no idea before I entered the office of the *Daily Express* that

men and women could live at such a pace. The whole building seemed to go through each day in a rapidly increasing uproar, until the mighty engines below stairs received in their greedy maws the results of the day's heart-straining scurryings.

The editor, R. D. Blumenfeld, known affectionately to and by everybody as "R.D.B.," was never alone for one moment. Even during my first (to me vital) interview with him we were interrupted at least ten times in five minutes.

I don't know what I expected the editor of a great London daily to look like. The last thing I expected was any similarity to a Public School headmaster. Yet "R.D.B." was so exactly like "Chas" Lowry in character, mannerisms and even physical build that I find myself even now continually confusing them. For instance, I am uncertain which of them it was, if either, or both, who in a sudden fit of passion at some unguarded outburst of mine let fly with his fist and laid me out at his feet. Both were quite capable of doing it, for both were men of unusually quick tempers. Both had eyes that twinkled merrily. Blumenfeld loved pulling people's legs.

"You know," he said at my first meeting, "I have to be careful whom I engage, for in all my years here I have never yet sacked a colleague." Years afterwards when I was on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* we were going up Fleet Street together when we saw the unusual sight of a hearse coming down the street. "Your night editors," said "R.D.B." wickedly, "coming on duty." As George Augusta Sala in his hey-day as editor of the *Daily Telegraph* used to drive to the office daily in an open brougham the comment had a double barb.

I got to know "R.D.B." a good deal better after I left the *Daily Express*. When I was working under him he inspired my affection quickly, but it was mingled with appropriate awe. He had no wish to have all his staff walking in on him at inappropriate moments, and he endeavoured to cool down my importunity by keeping me, as Chesterfield kept Dr. Johnson, waiting in his outer

office kicking my heels impatiently, knowing full well that there was nothing in the world I so much disliked as wasting time.

And it was this apparently essential wasting of time that so struck me on my first arrival. Reporters were called upon to work at top speed and cover vast distances at great discomfort to secure stories that were completely forgotten by the time they returned to the office.

The ordinary schoolmaster or business man has definitely scheduled hours of work. Outside these he is his own master. The journalist belongs to his paper, body and soul, night and day. His time is never his own. His opinions are not his own. Even his language is not his own.

It must be sufficiently irksome to a classically educated B.B.C. announcer to be compelled to perpetuate such an ugly and irrational word as "opus" with a long *ō*, but it is equally irksome to a writer who cares about accuracy to see his sentences altered to suit the peculiar jargon in vogue in his newspaper. There must of course be uniformity, but I should like to hear the defence for "interesting event" as synonym for "birth," "sustained injuries that ultimately proved fatal" for "killed" (the B.B.C. caught this disease from the Press), the refusal to describe any other newspaper by title more specific than "a contemporary," the description on all posters of all events as either "Sensational" or "Dramatic," and the refusal to allow any sentence to begin with "But."

There was not only a "black list" of words and phrases to be avoided, but of well-known public personalities whose names were never to be mentioned. I never knew what their crimes were, but I can well believe and hope it to be a passion for publicity which the editor refused to appease. I only wish this list had been expanded.

The owner of the paper, Lord Beaverbrook, always pleased me with his Puck-like face and tremendous energy. He seemed to be the kind of man who never went to bed. His paper was (and is) his life-passion.

He was always extremely kind to me, though I only recollect one occasion when I did any work directly under him. He sent for me one day and told me to write a "leader," on I forget what subject. I was just about to go off and do it when he motioned me to a sofa, sat at the other end of it himself, and then dictated the leader, asked to see what I had written, corrected the punctuation ("No semi-colons on this paper, please") and sent me off to have it set up exactly as he had dictated it.

He had surrounded himself with a very pleasant band of fellow-Canadians, of whom I knew best Beverley Baxter, the beaming cherubic features editor, who had already written a novel of unusual charm that had run serially in *Chambers's Journal*. He had now put novel-writing behind him as neither lucrative nor important enough. He had every intention of himself becoming a great power in the land. He was a man of unfailing affability who laughed easily and often, and never allowed his imperturbability to be disturbed.

The next power near the throne was about as different from the ex-piano-tuner bluff Canadian as could be imagined. This was the lean, scholarly, rather crabbed Pollock, one of the great family of judges, bishops, and headmasters, and bearing very strongly the Pollock characteristics. He seemed altogether miscast for a part in this *mélange*, but his influence was probably great in moderating the ardours of less far-sighted colleagues.

My job brought me into the closest possible contact with the three powers, "R.D.B.," Pollock and Baxter.

It is difficult to think of a job, apart from teaching, which was obviously my true métier, that I ought to have enjoyed more, for my post on the *Express* was that of book-reviewer or literary critic. I had visions of myself let loose daily among the newest books, selecting only those of the first importance, and being given leisure to read them and as much space as I thought fit in which to review them. But it didn't pan out like this at all.

There was a world of difference between the sorts of books that I liked reading and those which “R.D.B.” decided were the only ones that were worth bothering about. He made it abundantly clear that he had a low opinion of his readers’ capacity to read. “We’re not going to recommend them books to read. We’re going to save them the trouble of finding the juiciest plums for themselves by finding them for them.” This meant that every day I was detailed to the dreary task of “gutting” unreadable volumes of Memoirs to find some story, preferably of the Royal Family or a Cabinet Minister, that might be quoted in the news. There was no question of considered criticism. It was the short, pithy, dramatic “story” that was looked for.

In some ways it was a valuable lesson, for by hard experience I learnt that the sort of beginning that I had been used to writing was of no use in a newspaper review. First I had to quote the “sensational” story, and then somehow weave into it the name of the book from which I had taken it, the author, and of course the publisher, whose advertisement we naturally wanted, and the price. Time and again I failed to pick out the appropriate story, and was shown how it ought to be done by being sent the cuttings the next day from all the other newspapers with red marks against those stories that I had failed to “spot.” It didn’t console me much to realise that probably my story was being sent round all the other newspaper offices for their book-reviewers to study.

An enormous amount of time was spent every day in reading all the other papers to see what items of news we had missed and how our treatment of stories varied from those in other papers. It was, I think, forgotten that the average citizen has neither the time, money, nor inclination to institute this comparison, so our triumph in blazoning forth the fact that we had secured a “scoop,” a story shared with no other paper, seemed to me less important than it was made out to be.

Indeed, the insistence laid on the getting of a “scoop” was magnified out of all proportion to its worth. It is

obviously good that a reporter should see for himself what nobody else sees and from a highly individual angle, otherwise there is no point in having "Our own correspondent." Otherwise all news could be more profitably and economically printed straight from the various news-collecting associations.

But there is a vast difference between "splashing" your star reporter's eye-witness account of a Coronation and giving a "middle-page spread" to a quite unimportant story solely on the ground that it is exclusive to your paper.

On the other hand there is no denying that newspapers have brought themselves into prominence by bringing off a sudden, unsuspected "scoop." But most of these were imitative. No sooner had one newspaper announced £1,000 free insurance to its readers than its rival offered £2,000 to its readers. No sooner had one newspaper offered a free edition of Dickens to its readers than its rival offered free editions of Shakespeare and Scott.

These are the ordinary methods of competition. But there were certain "scoops" that were not capable of imitation and these would make us green with envy. I remember how the *Daily Mail* suddenly decided to make the play *The Man in Dress Clothes* popular. It began by being a complete flop, but the *Daily Mail* "plugged" it as if it were a favourite fox-trot until it actually became the most popular play of its time. *Outward Bound* also failed at the start, and was turned in similar fashion into a tremendous success, not by the *Daily Mail*. I was on the staff of the *Express* when the *Daily Mail* brought off a grand coup by "killing" a patent medicine called Yadil. The *Daily Mail* refused to sell its famous front page for an advertisement of this new widely boosted medicine. It had indeed been so well marketed that as George Blake says: "We were all persuaded that garlic, an essential component of this 'Yadil,' as advertised, had in it all the elements of true health, and it looked for a time as if mankind had discovered the key to corporeal sanity."

Quite suddenly the *Daily Mail* decided to kill it. It was a monstrously uneven battle. An article by Sir William Pope, Professor of Chemistry at Cambridge, analysing it as 95% water, 4% glycerine, 1% formaldehyde “and a smell,” a second article by another famous chemist, an editorial, and “Yadil” was stone dead. That was a perfect example of the power of the Press. It was a stunt and it came off.

The *Daily Mail* have not always brought off these stunts. They have tried to make us eat a standardised bread (was it the bread of Sir Oswald Mosley’s father?). They have tried to make us put on standardised hats (were they Winston’s hats?). They have tried to make us take off all our hats, standardised or not, to France and later to Hungary, but audiences, as music-hall comedians have every reason to know, are fickle cattle, and stunts which may make a big bang are as likely as not to prove damp squibs. And in any event they lead to distortion of news.

The public do not as a rule take enough trouble to work out how very odd is the interpretation put by the Press on the word news. If you want to be in or for that matter out of the news you must time your death or your divorce with as much acumen as Hitler times his world-shaking repudiations of treaties. Hitler always chooses a Saturday. If your death or divorce makes a headline in the early editions of the evening papers you will be spared much comment the next morning, for the London newspapers work on the odd principle that the whole country buys the London evening papers and therefore the news-value of your decease or unhappy marriage is over.

It is of course pretty obvious that all news-value is relative, and that during a momentous week during which the whole nation is disturbed by the possibility of a change in kingship the winning of a cricket Test match is completely overlooked. In normal times the fact of dismissing Australia for fifty-five runs would have been the occasion of self-congratulatory leading articles proving that the old country was still all-powerful. But in

times of fewer thunderbolts there is less reason for the elevation of one piece of news to front rank and the relegation of another to the obscurity of a paragraph or to silence.

The first bursting upon the world of Einstein's Theory of Relativity for instance was itself considered of less relative importance than the private scandal of the moment.

The cheaper newspapers are more concerned to give the sort of news that the great majority can absorb without thought but with the quickest titivation of the senses than to preserve a golden mean.

Those who get comfort out of spiritualism and astrology will continue to listen to and believe in the soothsayer however often he is shown up.

How else could anybody go on reading day after day the hourly falsified predictions of the racing experts whose chance of giving the right prophecy can easily be gauged by any one who can keep his head where horses are concerned and make a simple calculation?

It is a great pity that so few boys and girls ever advance so far in mathematics as the Laws of Probability. Here, Sir or Madam, is a simple problem which may help you to fathom your own stupidity in the matter of backing this or that.

You toss a penny into the air. What are the chances of its coming down heads? You know that. Right. It comes down tails. You toss it again. What are the chances *now* (I italicise that "now" to help) of its coming down heads? You know that. Right. It comes down tails *again*. (I italicise that "again" to help.) You toss it for a third time. What are the chances now of its coming down heads? You're less certain, aren't you? Why? Anyway toss. It comes down tails for the third time. You toss it for the fourth time. Here is the problem. Does your inclination this time coincide with the mathematical law of probability? Or to put it more simply, what are the chances of its coming down heads? You try. It comes down tails for the fourth time. What you do now depends on your character, and not

at all on the mathematical laws of which you are heartily tired.

Well, that is what happens when you're by yourself. How much more gullible you are when all the beauty and insidious logic of the English language is invoked to make you put your trust in "True Thomas" who "gave all five winners yesterday." He omits to say that these were all odds on, and he omits to say that he gave all five losers the day before. Newspapers, like the Pope, do not call attention to possible fallibility unless coerced by the Courts. If you see a regret expressed about a mistake you can be quite sure that it is a regret expressed under coercion and dictated by the solicitor of the other side.

I was surprised to find that I was not only not allowed to keep the books that I reviewed, but I was not allowed to mark the passages I wanted to refer to for quotation. I had to content myself with paper tabs like Sir Walter Raleigh.

But my next surprise was greater still. I had of course been accustomed always to work in the quiet of my study, or the calm of a classroom. I expected a little, perhaps sound-proof, room to be allotted for my private use.

To my great distress I found myself placed at a roll-top desk in a vast upper room exactly like the upper storey of a factory. There were people chattering, shouting, singing, and running to and fro all day long. And in this racket I was expected to concentrate on sober reading.

On my right sat "George" Strube, the cartoonist, a strongly-built, genial little man who ran a "pub" on Hampstead Heath where he was forever asking me to go and ride with him and stay with him. As he was one of my staunchest friends I have no idea why I never accepted his invitation. He always used to bring in a consignment of apples, oranges and bananas for me to eat. This made a change from the interminable cups of tea we all seemed to drink.

On my left was a tall, cadaverous, silent Gascon who,

armed with an enormous pair of scissors, spent the whole of each and every day cutting out of foreign newspapers cuttings which in his opinion would make good material for a story. When any of his stories found acceptance he translated them into English and they appeared under the heading "Moscow," "Barcelona," "Tahiti," "Peshawar," "Vladivostok," with the black leaded type "From our Special Correspondent."

One corner of the room was partitioned off into a tiny cupboard in which sat three "star" reporters, each armed with a typewriter. Their names were H. V. Morton, J. B. Morton, and Bevan Dominic Wyndham Lewis.

H. V. Morton was a thin, tall, quiet man with a deathly pale face and jet-black hair. He had a passion for Egyptology which he was later to have full means to satisfy. In those days he was sent out on all the biggest stories and invariably came back with the least fuss and the best results. He was, and is, entirely devoid of arrogance, haste, bluster, or any of the attributes that we are apt to associate with the "Star" reporter.

J. B. Morton, who had "reigned in Hell" to the extent of spending four years at Worcester after leaving Harrow, was the son of the author of *San Toy*. He was the opposite of H. V. Morton in almost every single respect. He was short, fat, very red of face, and always shouting at the top of his voice some such sentences as: "By the Cross of St. Chrysostom of Padua do you howling dervishes call this a cup of tea? Give me beer, beer in a tankard, village home-brew. Throw this insipid potion into a cesspool, into the street, down the drain, or I will beat all your heads in with my trusty Ariosto Furioso." Then he would roar and brandish his astonishing cudgel which he always brought with him to the office. He dressed in rough Harris tweed shooting-jacket, grey flannel trousers, and heavy hob-nailed climbing boots. He had written an excellent novel called *The Barber of Putney* and a collection of essays called *Penny Royal*. But his shouting invariably called down on him the execration of the other two men.

"B-blast your B-B-Bellocian b-b-bellowing," Bevan Lewis would stammer. "I w-want to—to w-w-work."

H. V. Morton was even more terse with him, but his spirits were quite unquenchable. He was a recent convert to Catholicism and wished to proselytise everybody who approached. He was an extremely likeable person whose only fault was that he could find nothing good to say about England, nothing bad to say about France. Eventually he became the writer of the daily funny column of the paper, under the pseudonym of "Beachcomber."

The original "Beachcomber" was Pollock, and it would be hard to think of anyone less fitted for the job. He soon handed it over to D. B. Wyndham Lewis. When I arrived in the office he had just taken over the job of "Beachcomber" and his contribution to the column was to turn it into a sort of Heath Robinson show. He was at his best, and a very good best it was, when he was letting his imagination run riot mathematically.

J. B. Morton is at his best in creating characters with absurd names—Cabstanleigh, Thakeham and so on, who behave rather like the characters in Weedon Gross-smith's *Diary of a Nobody*. Lewis was a great lover of Villon and Verlaine and Rabelais.

J. B. Morton appeared to know no other author than Hilaire Belloc, on whose ethics he undoubtedly modelled his own.

There was a constant stream of callers into our room from people submitting paragraphs to Lewis to work up into his "Beachcomber" column to attractive young girls with portfolios under their arms trying to sell photographs from the photographic agencies to the Art Editor. As we had our own staff of photographers it seemed strange that so much work should be submitted from outside or that with such a wide range of subjects the Art Editor should nearly always select one picture of a casualty in a hospital, one *divorcée* leaving the Law Courts, one City Banquet, one marriage group, and one girl of no apparent importance and few clothes.

I sighed for beauty, and even dared to suggest that one superb photograph of a windjammer under sail or a team of horses pulling a tree, or hounds in full cry, or the waves breaking on the shore would prove more acceptable than these inartistic, rather gloomy reminders of life's uncertainty.

But they persisted in their daily pictorial morgue. And perhaps they are right. In the United States those astute young men who made a fortune out of "Time" and "Fortune" killed the old "Life" in order to use its title, and in the new "Life" concentrate almost wholly on pictures of death. I once asked the editor of a provincial paper why he published so few pictures of the beautiful country-side which everybody liked and so many of local dinners which nobody could possibly care tuppence about, and he said: "You're entirely wrong. The country scene doesn't pay. The people who figure in any dance or banquet group do."

But in later years *The Times* did what I had for so long advocated, and gave from time to time large reproductions of photographs of ploughing teams, the woods in spring, and other reminders of the loveliness of the country-side, and they immensely enhanced their reputation thereby.

In addition to the well-dressed young women from outside who brightened our lives with photographs of accidents by flood and field there were also young women attached to the staff. Mrs. Peacocke presided over the women's page, a daring innovation, due, I believe, to Beaverbrook's insistence that he would make women read his paper and drapers advertise in it. Before this novel departure it was taken for granted that newspapers were written by men for men. But there were in my room two very able young women, Miss Courlander, whose brother, killed in the War, had been a notable Fleet Street figure, and Mrs. Charlotte Burghes, who afterwards married Professor J. B. S. Haldane, who had, together with his sister, Naomi Mitchison, been a pupil of mine when I went for half a term to Lynam's just after taking my degree. And in addition to the

women we harboured the whole of the free insurance staff, whose business it was to pacify readers whose voices sounded anything but pacific as they shouted their grievances.

Busy and full as our room was it was nothing to the main news-room downstairs where sub-editors sat at a sort of horseshoe table “vetting” copy, with white-haired Sarle snipping away with his great scissors as each edition of the evening papers came in, J. B. Wilson, the Night-Editor, never without an enormous pipe in his mouth, and Geoffrey Gilbey, a contemporary of mine at the “House,” a Quarter-Mile Blue, a fellow “Survivor” and then racing correspondent to the *Express*, to-day a leader of the Oxford Group movement which I regard much as I regarded Torrey and Alexander of old. There were “R. D. B.’s” two sons, Elliot, a quiet hard-working man of great ability and concentration who is now Traffic Manager of the Southern Railway, and “Dave,” an ebullient spirit, almost as noisy as J. B. Morton and even fuller of fire and enthusiasm. “Dave’s” enjoyment of life was so great that he had great difficulty in holding himself in at all. He was for ever singing.

And finally there was a most likeable young man just down from Oxford who came in to do Parliamentary notes. His name was Leslie Hore-Belisha.

After living in the country all my life I did not at all relish the prospect of living in London, so I decided to live by the sea at Hove and go up from there to the office every day. I had to be in the office by ten o’clock, but that was easy. I travelled up daily by the 8.40, a train almost entirely confined to stockbrokers. I became one of a group of eight who used to fight first to secure a carriage, and then to keep it to ourselves.

Our company included the Kent cricketer E. W. Dillon, an ex-officer of the Union-Castle company who had been given a life-pension by the widow of a South African millionaire whose life he had attempted to save by diving off the deck of the liner into the sea, and other

extremely well-dressed City men all of whom seemed to be very well off.

Until Haywards Heath they read the news, copying figures into note-books about the stock-markets. Then they settled down to the serious business of bridge. They were quite unable to understand my preference for reading one of my mighty volumes of memoirs or for writing. I wrote my novels at this stage of my career partly in the train and partly in the office when I had no books to review.

At ten o'clock I waited the pleasure of "R. D. B.'s" or Beverley Baxter's decision on my suggestions about the space to be accorded to the books I was then at work on.

There was a morning conference of high officials in which a dummy of the next day's paper was passed round with the advertising columns determining the space left for editorial matter.

On the strength of this conference we were all despatched on our several missions to get stories of this and that, or (in my case) to write so much on the book of the day. This part of the day was relatively quiet. Those who chose to have lunch in the office had it more or less to themselves. But even then it was difficult to get an interview with "R. D. B."

The pace and noise began to increase after four o'clock. There was another conference at five o'clock in which the original plans of the earlier conference were invariably "scrapped," and an entirely different paper arranged. This was partly due to more (or less) advertisement space and partly to some event like an earthquake, assassination, or a political speech that had occurred since the morning conference. It almost invariably meant that my copy had to be "cut" down by a half or more, and I had the mortification day after day of seeing my whole effort so truncated as to be unrecognisable, or cut out altogether to make room for some advertisement.

In my anger I was quite unable to see the rightness of this. I did not realise, as I should have, if I had had shares in the paper, that its prosperity depended upon

the quantity of advertisements it carried. In my ignorance I thought that special columns should be devoted to and kept for advertisements and that no tampering with Editorial columns should ever be permitted.

I did not realise how sensitive advertisers are. If you want to prove that look how much reduced in size are all our newspapers during the great national holidays. At Christmas time a Sunday paper which usually contains forty pages is reduced to sixteen or eighteen. This is not due to lack of news but to a general stoppage of advertisements. It is little wonder that the advertising manager is sometimes a little condescending to the Editorial Staff, in response to the bitter feelings aroused in them by his casual daily annexation of their space.

My duties were not of course confined to the reading and reviewing of books. I was expected to take those in my stride. Now indeed there was some justification for that picture of a man with a load of books under his arm. I was given all the submitted serials to read and advise upon.

One day Edgar Wallace came in with a serial and offered it to us for, I think, £40. I turned it down. I imagine that a few years later he could have commanded £400 or perhaps £4000. The figures paid by newspapers are quite fantastic. They are prepared to pay prices that strike us as outrageous to get exactly what they want.

I was sent to bargain with Lady Oxford over one article and with Winston Churchill over another. He interviewed me in bed, Sara and Randolph racing up and down the passage outside. Lady Oxford entertained me to luncheon in her Bloomsbury house.

Being a journalist meant not only contact with new books but with famous people. Up to now I had met only those connected with the teaching profession or officers of the R.A.F. But on my joining the *Daily Express* my boundaries were widened on every side. I came to meet people famous in every branch of life and letters.

I was invited to give a series of lectures to young

society débutantes on modern books. Among my pupils there was Megan Lloyd George. They were an alert, intelligent crowd, but she was easily the most enlightened among them, the first in argument, the most tenacious borrower of my books.

Pelman decided to produce a book of world literature and invited me to edit it. For months I ransacked the world's treasures, and hacked them to pieces to get the outstanding passages, but after paying me £25 a week for about six months the firm decided not to proceed to publication.

I became a member of a club started by Bevill Rudd, the Olympic runner, called the Tuesday Club, which met for luncheon once a week at the "Cheshire Cheese" and drank rum punch. Lady Eleanor Smith, Leslie Henson, Madge Saunders and Yvonne Arnaud were the mainstays of this group, and the conversation though rarely Johnsonian was often as witty as Johnson's.

I had been a member of the Savage Club for some years and there joined another small group of monthly diners led by Edgar Jepson and a brilliant lecturer at East London College called Routh. We used to discuss mathematics.

On Saturday nights I occasionally attended the house dinners of the Savage Club, and it was here that I first met John Hassall the artist and Charlie Evans the forceful managing director of Heinemann's.

At night on my way home (I seldom got away until the paper was put to bed and often not until it was printed) I met yet another crowd, the London "theatricals" who lived in Brighton, Ambrose Thorne, George Tully, Tubby Edlin, who like most comedians was almost always lugubrious, though he had little reason to be economically, as he owned a chain of Brighton hotels, Herbert Jay, who had made a small fortune out of *A Little Bit of Fluff* and was now even more lugubrious than Edlin with more cause, H. F. Maltby, who wrote good plays as well as acting well in them and beagled in his spare time, and David Minlore who made

money by selling pictures and lost it by writing plays.

There was also a quite different sort of playwright, the bearded author of *Marigold*, who told me that the secret of living long and happily lay in always carrying and of course using an air-cushion. I told him with what ill-success I had preached that hedonistic philosophy at Rossall. I would have given much to have brought him and Trist (also a Brightonian) together.

But the most interesting character by far on the midnight train was the little friend of all the world, the “*Kim de nos jours*”, Harry Preston, the owner of the Royal Albion Hotel, a lion-hearted wisp of a man with one single hair standing upright on his polished eggshell of a head, eyes that never seemed to open, a handshake that was like a steel grip with which he used to pull you to him, and a lisp so entrancing that it seemed almost impossible to believe that it wasn’t purposely adopted. He had gathered round him as close and loyal friends every type of sportsman from the Duke of Windsor to Arnold Bennett. His taste in friends as in activities was so catholic that in his hotel you would meet at one dinner-party George Robey, Lord Leconfield, the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, inveighing against the habit of girls walking bare-backed along the Brighton front, Jim Mollison, Maurice Baring, getting ready to do his famous balancing-the-bottle trick, Solly Joel, and always of course his intimate and dearest friend George Nicholls, better known to readers of the *Daily Mail* as “Quex”, so easily the best gossip-writer this country has yet produced that the rest seem by comparison to be just cheap and vulgar.

His chief passions were the Royal Sussex County Hospital for which he raised enormous sums every year, and boxing. He knew all the great boxers of his time and it was actually with Harry Preston and Gene Tunney that I saw Henley Regatta from the lawn of Phyllis Court.

Gene roared with laughter at canons, archdeacons and bishops darting excitedly up and down in tiny faded

shrunk schoolboy caps of light and dark blue and Leander pink stuck on the backs of their heads.

"Talk about swelled heads," he said. "These guys are all swollen-headed."

It didn't matter what time of day you chose to call on Harry. Having greeted you as if you were his long-lost son he would clap his hands violently, shout at the top of his voice impatiently: "Waiter! Waiter!" and then in an undertone, to you, his guest, "Just a bottle of the boy." And forth would come the bottle of champagne whether it was nine o'clock in the morning or three in the afternoon. He himself had the unusual habit of mixing rare liqueur brandy with soda-water.

He took me with him to Solly Joel's famous Ascot luncheons at Maiden Erleigh, to Tom Honey's equally famous dinner parties where the size of the sweepstakes would have kept me in affluence for the rest of my life, and to the almost religious dinners of the Gastronomes where every course was tasted in rapturous and holy silence before being explained by the chef. I suppose Harry was by far the best-known Englishman of his time.

I remember being taken by Irene Castle, the famous American dancer, to see her husband's ice-hockey team play in Chicago. When she knew that I knew Harry Preston my stock went up almost as much as if I had said that I was a personal friend of the King.

Harry entertained in his hotel the Oxford and Cambridge athletic teams and crews, football cup finalists, Australian test cricketers, American tennis champions, and all the leading actresses, artists and authors. Indeed on any given day if I were sent to track to earth anybody well in the public eye I should have tried the Royal Albion, Brighton, even before the Savoy.

Brighton and England were the sadder for his passing. He was the last of the Regency Bucks, and as I pass the windows of the Royal Albion now I seem to see his trim little figure bobbing up and down as he jigged and polkaed round the floor singing as he passes "A sweat a day keeps the doctor away," his favourite and most oft-repeated maxim. And the hall of that hotel still

rings with that rising peal of clear sunny laughter with which he used to round off his inimitably told stories.

My duties did not end, like those of the rest of the staff of the *Daily Express*, on Friday nights. I was attached to the staff of the *Sunday Express* under the editorship of James Douglas, a stern, almost Calvinistic moralist who by a strange irony had written in earlier life one of the most sympathetic essays extant on Robert Burns. You may read it for yourself in the Everyman Edition, and if you know the latter-day work of James Douglas it will undoubtedly surprise you.

Once again my job was the reviewing of books. I managed to give Joyce's *Ulysses* a quite adequate notice of praise without anybody getting at all excited. But some months later I was sent for by Douglas and asked to write an attack on it. I pointed out the fact that I had already praised it. Douglas, well knowing the short-lived memory of his public, came out with a blazing onslaught on the book, no less severe than his later castigation of Miss Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* which I had thought too turgid to merit a review at all.

But I had much else to do beyond book-reviewing. Perhaps my most astonishing job was going to see a film of a crook melodrama and rewriting from it the story of the film as a serial in order to make *Sunday Express* readers go to see the picture.

I was present at the famous football cup final at Wembley when a hundred thousand would-be spectators rushed the gates and stormed the ground, notwithstanding the presence of the King. Over a thousand people were injured, and the telephone box from which I attempted to give a running commentary of the scene to the *Sunday Express* was smashed in on top of me like match-boarding.

I, who shun crowds whenever possible, seem during my years in Fleet Street always to have been present where the crowd was thickest and most out of hand. As a result I now prefer to hear my Coronation scenes over the air rather than endure them in actuality.

After nearly three years on the *Daily Express* I was able to make up my mind about certain aspects of journalism. I realised that many of the harsh things that have been said about it are without foundation.

Lord Morley's description of it as "that huge engine for keeping discussion on a low level" might fairly be countered with the true statement that it helps to keep discussion fair.

Ruskin's contention that newspapers were just "so many leagues of dirtily printed falsehood" invites the repetition of Pilate's question "What is Truth?"

News is selective Truth. Leslie Stephens' definition of the journalist as a man who writes for pay on matters of which he is ignorant might be answered by saying that the journalist is the middle man who endeavours to interpret matters that well might be mysterious or misunderstood without his aid. Rose Macaulay's question is much more searching. Here it is:

"Is it," she asks, "a depressing or a cheering thought that if the Editor threw into the wastepaper basket all that he printed and printed all that he found in the wastepaper basket no one would know the difference, nor would it make the slightest difference to anybody?"

If you read the *Daily Herald* and the *Morning Post* of the same day you are almost driven to the belief that each Editor has printed the other Editor's wastepaper basket.

Lord Hewart once said of *The Times*, now dethroned by the Oxford Union from its one-time unquestioned premier position, that it "exhibits day by day infallibility without arrogance, omniscience without condescension, fastidiousness without severity, and is monumental without being statuesque." Monumental is right.

I left the *Express* quite suddenly. There was a particularly sensational murder case in which a young woman, Mrs. Thompson, and her younger lover, Bywaters, were both executed for the murder of her husband. The case aroused tremendous excitement, and there was little room for any news beyond that dealing with this case. That I could well understand.

What I did resent was the constant presence in my

already overcrowded room of near and far relatives and connexions of the guilty man and woman writing away for dear life. And when I say for dear life I mean it. Their revelations were being bought at a very high figure, which went to pay for legal costs, appeals and so on.

I found the whole thing intolerable. In the end unable to stand it any longer I went downstairs to complain. My chiefs were really astonished. They couldn't make head or tail of such squeamishness. “All right,” they said. “If you don't like it you know what to do.”

So I went straight across the road, called on William Will, who at once offered me the post of news-editor of the *Daily Graphic* at the salary of £1,092 a year. Again I had left a job to get a rise. I had no more idea of what the duties of a news-editor were than I had of sailing a ship, but one thing I was determined about. The Thompson-Bywaters murder was not going to be splashed in the *Daily Graphic*.

Chapter VIII

THE "DAILY GRAPHIC," 1923-1926

I WAS never News-Editor of the *Daily Graphic* in anything but name. Sir William Berry (now Lord Camrose) owned the paper, William Will was General Manager, Tebbutt, a long lean lanky Novocastrian since dead, was Editor, Edward Munton, a fat jovial Lancastrian, also since dead, was Night Editor, Hannen Swaffer, a tall cadaverous Don Quixote-like man who wore the broad-brimmed dusty black hat that I always associated with an out-of-work actor caricatured by Phil May, was the gossip-writer, "Mr. London," and I was the maid-of-all-work.

A little lady one day came in and offered us soothing thoughts for the day in doggerel verse to be printed as prose. She was given a contract of half a crown a day for her verses and we took a chance. Her name was Wilhelmina Stitch.

A man came in one day and offered us the British copyright of a new American craze called Crossword Puzzles. We threw him out. "That's not the sort of thing that'll attract the English public," we said. "It'll be dead in a week." That was in 1924.

A man claiming to be the illegitimate son of Robert Louis Stevenson, and looking exactly like R. L. S., came in and offered us his life history. The trouble was that he couldn't spell and couldn't write.

There was no job on the *Daily Graphic* that I did not undertake except that of editing it. My main job, and much my most difficult, was that of collecting gossip. The sort of people whom I knew in Society would regard with horror any repetition of their private conversation in the gossip columns of the *Daily Graphic*, so my mouth was quite rightly shut on many topics that my

editor was anxious that I should give tongue. I preferred to gossip about things that would not affect my friends' relations with each other or the outside world.

I usually contrived to put in a paragraph about the big sales at Sotheby's and Christie's. I was present when the Earl of Durham sold "The Blue Boy" to Mr. Huntington. I was present when the Christie-Miller library was split up and sold for over £500,000, mainly to Dr. Rosenbach of Philadelphia.

I remember especially one historic afternoon when a comparatively unknown book which looked like selling for a few shillings was raised and raised again by Rosenbach until he eventually bought it for over two hundred pounds. When I asked him why he was prepared to go to that figure he pointed out to me with a grin what no other bidder had even seen, a minute inscription on the inner back cover "Fr: Bacon, hys booke -/4d."

I found excitement in watching a first folio Shakespeare change hands at £12,000, and I tried to communicate that excitement to *Daily Graphic* readers.

I went out in the morning, armed with the Calendar of Events for the day, I would attend Civic luncheons and listen to every speech, and try to get an interview with any prominent guest who seemed interesting. I would run up and down Bond Street on the off-chance of meeting some famous man or woman to illuminate my page, and nearly always I would meet Joe Coyne and Nelson Keys, and they would be full of gossip, which I would drink in eagerly only to discover when I got back to the office that "we want no more theatre." I would run across my friend Gilbert Frankau and have a most interesting discussion with him on points of construction and punctuation, only to be told that "we want no more Frankau."

One day a boy who had been in my form at Sherborne asked me to meet his sister at luncheon. She was just down from Oxford and had written a book, a novel. Would I meet her? Would I read it? Shudderingly I accepted. My life was too full of books that had been published. What had I to do with books that had yet

to find a publisher? I was rude and in a hurry. I glanced through the book and dismissed it as "just one more unreadable." The book was *The Constant Nymph*, the girl, Margaret Kennedy. I had not thought her worthy of mention in my gossip.

She forgave me handsomely by asking me to the dress rehearsal of the play. After the first act we went across to the Ivy for a drink. "What do you think of it?" asked Margaret Kennedy.

"As I didn't hear one word," I replied, "it's difficult to judge. But if Noel Coward could be induced ever to turn round and face the audience when he speaks and stop for one moment shouting and playing we might get to know what the play is supposed to be about."

The Ivy in those days was only just beginning its great career. Fay Compton and George Robey were the first actress and actor to go there regularly. In after years I used to go there often as the guest of one of the kindest and most gracious of hosts, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes.

I can think of no sillier method of collecting gossip than walking up and down Bond Street trusting to luck that you will run into somebody interesting with a story to tell. I kept on meeting bishops and headmasters, but their shyness about being reported was more than a little troublesome to one whose living depended on reporting what they said.

I became, among other things, the art critic of the *Daily Graphic*. A fondness for experiment in modern art is scarcely sufficient justification for an appointment as critic, and I am really very much surprised to find that twelve years after my efforts to get a word of sense said about exhibitions of paintings I still get invitations to private views. I made fast friends with Mr. Brown and Mr. Phillips of the Leicester Galleries, and I had the good fortune to be piloted round several exhibitions by Osbert and Sachaverell Sitwell, whose judgments on art and literature were as astute as they were refreshing.

I was present at the unveiling in Hyde Park of Epstein's *Rima*, and I seemed to be almost alone in liking it. I liked its forcefulness and its originality, and said so.

I liked Epstein's sculptured figure of Christ which was bought by my friend Apsley Cherry-Garrard whose taste in art is both individual and sound. He was up at the "House" with me, rowed in Trial Eights, went out to China in search of the tsetse fly, and paid Captain Scott a thousand pounds for the privilege of accompanying him to the South Pole as Zoologist. On his return he wrote *The Worst Journey in the World*, which I believe to be the best book on Arctic or Antarctic exploration ever written.

I met C. R. W. Nevinson who looks like a Rugger forward and is in fact the most sensitive man (after Henry Williamson) whom I know. He gave me a water-colour of the South Downs which has captured exactly the elusive loveliness of those soft downs. Brilliant son of a most brilliant father he has inherited something of his father's caustic wit. He does not bear fools gladly, and is for ever striving to break new ground and improve on his own standards of art. His war pictures were terrifying in their expression of hate, and ought to be permanently in front of those who advocate war as healthy. Henry Rushbury, the red-faced humorous A.R.A., gives the impression of being a Yorkshire farmer whereas in point of fact he was, like Gerald Brockhurst (who is the highest paid portrait-painter in the world), born in Birmingham, and came with him penniless to London to starve or make a name.

I never met Augustus John, but I was always running into amusing people who had been or claimed to be his models. One of them, Eileen Hawthorn, became so popular as a model that her portrait in one form or another has appeared in almost every room in the Academy.

Occasionally a private view would become news as when D. H. Lawrence's pictures were exhibited before the Censor pounced on them. Generally if I wanted to get in a paragraph about any exhibition I had to base my criticism on the personality of the painter. Powell was news because he was a master at Eton. The Duchess of Rutland was of course news. Epstein was news because

of the violent antagonisms he aroused. I was always on his side because of his vigour. I disliked his insistence on orientalising every subject, and I disliked the ugliness of a good number of his models. His Eve, showing an unusually robust Oriental woman in the advanced stages of expectant motherhood, disgusted many people, but it seems to me illogical to regard any stage of motherhood as disgusting in so far as such an action implies blasphemy, and it is now being forgotten, as are most acts of the pioneer, that Epstein was among the first to shock us out of our complacent acceptance of the pretty-pretty chocolate-box-cover paintings of Cadogan Cowper.

I had met the Quaker artists Dod and Ernest Procter when they were struggling to found a school in Newlyn, and Dod's insistence on painting fat and none too comely Cornish girls badly shook a generation that had grown up to admire Stanhope Forbes' battalion of slim graceful bathing boys.

Laura Knight was down there getting her vivid colour-sense with which she was ultimately to enrich the circus world. Again the lament went up that Laura Knight's circus horse ladies were as generously built as Velasquez' Venus. Our conception of feminine beauty was taken from Steve Hannagan's bathing belles of Miami, beauty-prize winners of Blackpool and Southend, the Step Sisters of the B.B.C., Mr. C. B. Cochran's "Young Ladies" and the *Daily Mirror* "Eight." McEvoy tried to restore the balance by painting only débutantes, and made them all look like garden-rakes loosely wrapped in chiffon.

The battle still rages, and I am, as I have always been, on the side of the slim. But the better artists have all found beauty in more voluptuous curves, and prefer to transmit to their canvas the promise of "pneumatic bliss."

I soon discovered that pure art criticism, even if I had been capable of contributing a considered opinion, was not wanted. Most of my art criticisms appeared in the *Diary* of Mr. London to which I contributed every day, and at times practically the whole of it.

I got to know the Bond Street galleries well, and it was a pleasant relaxation after trying in vain to find more thrilling stories to talk to one or other of the smartly groomed, beaming young men whose thankless job it is to sell pictures.

Private Views were of course great social occasions, not exactly rivalling first nights, but attracting the same coterie, Eddie Marsh, the Sitwells, and the rest. In spite of reading Clive Bell, Keynes-Smith, Wilenski, Rutter, Roger Fry, and the other critics, I could never make head or tail of the jargon used by the connoisseur. I tried to learn what the newest schools were up to, and refused merely to write offensive paragraphs about their work, for ridicule is better reserved for the pompous and contented artist who repeats year by year the same flock of sheep, and the same Highland cattle feeding a little farther upstream with the rain a little nearer than the year before. I was not content to rail at the Academy or to search for a sensational story, though Orpen and Collier always provided us with a lead on the one side, as the latest portrait of the King provided us with a safe subject on the other. But I was always at the mercy of landscape, and the Academy gave me a chance of visiting vicariously Devon shores, Cotswold uplands, Yorkshire dales and Highland glens that I no longer had time to visit in the flesh.

In addition to my other jobs I was made dramatic critic. Now most dramatic critics more or less confine their attention to the theatre. I had to take the theatre in my stride, and to go straight to the first night after sending in my copy as reporter or gossip-writer without a chance to dine or dress. Most newspapers have one man or two whose business it is to do nothing but criticise plays, and other men whose business it is to do nothing but secure before anybody else advance news about forthcoming plays.

I had to combine both these functions in addition to all my other work. The latter was by far the harder. It entailed being in very close and constant touch with the

publicity directors attached to the producers, excellent fellows but harassed on both sides by employers who naturally wanted the public's appetite whetted at the most auspicious time, neither before nor after, and also by the newspaper men who naturally wanted exclusive stories all the time.

Every morning I had to go through a great pile of letters containing the latest theatrical advance news. I might just as well have thrown them away unread, because I knew that these letters had been sent round to all the other papers, and no paper would use what was common to the rest, again forgetting the fact that the great majority of the public only read one paper. What happened was that I had to ring up all the publicity men, demand an interview, and bully them into giving me an exclusive story. Naturally no one wanted to give a first-rate exclusive story to a paper like the *Daily Graphic* that was read by few and obviously on its last legs. I was given the last bone.

I worked indefatigably to get "scoops" and waylaid authors and actors all over the place. I got in point of fact a great amount of advance news, but as it was usually supplied by friends in confidence I said nothing.

I knew Bernard Shaw fairly well because I had met him when I was staying with Cherry-Garrard at Lamer which is within a mile of Shaw's house at Ayot St. Laurence, and I had met him with another contemporary of mine at the "House," Edward Lane-Claypon, who had leased to him his own home, the Rectory, when he was Rector of Ayot. This meant that I learnt a good deal of Shaw's advance plans, but quite obviously I could not trade on a private friendship to make public what he didn't wish made public. It was a tantalising position, because my job depended on my divulging news that I was in honour bound not to divulge.

In the same way Sir James Barrie honoured me with his friendship, and once he understood that what he said in Adelphi Terrace would go no further he gave me items of news for which Fleet Street would have given at that time a good deal.

H. G. Wells not only used to ask me down to Easton in the Sunday hockey days of Mr. Britling, but he gave me signed copies of each of his novels as they came out.

Arnold Bennett didn't at all like my disparaging comments on his less successful novel *A Pretty Lady*, and took it out of me properly by ridiculing the mixture of my metaphors in the notice I wrote of the first night of *The Beggar's Opera*. I was certainly carried away by that play in which he of course had the controlling interest, and I wrote a most glowing eulogy of it. I never stinted praise where I felt it was deserved, but it gave him a chance, when the success of the play was established, to draw attention to it once more, and at the same time (adversely) to me.

Few of my contemporaries have been more uneven than Bennett. He wrote like an angel in *The Old Wives' Tale*, and his power was undiminished in *Riceyman Steps*. He had a lively wit, and a passion for pure English, but he never outgrew the provincialism that made the Savoy Hotel in his eyes the Earthly Paradise. He was a charming companion and generous to a fault. His appearance and high-pitched voice were quite the worst things about him. His stammer was one of the best. His faults were all on the surface. Underneath he was true gold.

I met Noel Coward through one of the Co-Optimists, Betty Chester, long before anybody realised that he had any outstanding qualities at all. He must be completely unaffected by success, because he still remembers the glowing notice that I wrote of his first play which attracted no attention. He must be nearly the hardest working man alive. No man living knows better how to subordinate his characters to the limitations of the stage. He times every entrance, every exit, and every gesture and jest with the supreme exactitude of genius. The trouble is that he still bestows his gifts on the unworthy. It is the story of Pope's "Dunciad" all over again. It is not wisdom to waste big shot on small people. Coward lacks the universal touch. He is one of the most likeable and unassuming of men.

It is in many ways the supreme compensation of being

a journalist that you are brought into the closest touch with all the leading men and women of the day.

Head and shoulders above the rest I would put Meggie Albanesi, whom I adored on this side idolatry more than any actress except Duse. Her frailty, her youth, and her beauty were all endearing, but it was the passion of her zeal for her art that was frightening. She may have had her human relationships. To me she was pure spirit, and I still glow with happiness when I think of the way she poured out her love on me and allowed me within the very small circle of her intimates. But after death so little remains. I recall a round of gramophone shops, listening to records of dance tunes, of helping her to buy shoes, of her mother in that tiny flat. No more in private life, except her letters.

But on the stage what a white heat of passion she put into her part in *A Bill of Divorcement*. How exactly did such a dilemma suit her tragic genius. She was cast in the mould of Emily Brontë. She shared Emily's physical slightness. She shared Emily's titanic spiritual strength in loneliness. Her opposite number in that play, Robert Harris, was in my form when I was a master at Sherborne, a quiet, very good-looking boy with an unusually deep and resonant voice and a genuine love of literature, which is unusual in an actor.

I remember being sent one day to see Sir Gerald du Maurier in his dressing-room to ask him what was the truth of the rumour that Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* had been dramatised by A. A. Milne, and that he was himself taking a leading part in it.

Rather abruptly he said: "I've never heard of *The Wind in the Willows*. What is it?"

There were a lot of people in his dressing-room. Without thinking I said: "How old are you?"

He looked surprised, and replied: "As it happens I'm fifty-one to-day. What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything," I replied. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for daring to admit that you've grown so old and not yet read it. I'm going straight off to buy you a copy for your birthday."

I ran all the way from Wyndham's Theatre to Hatchard's, and all the way back with my precious burden, in which I had inscribed: "To Gerald du Maurier, who ought to be ashamed of having lived so long and read so little, on his 51st birthday."

The odd thing about this story is not the illiteracy or ignorance of actors, but the fact that A. A. Milne did dramatise *The Wind in the Willows* under the title of *Toad of Toad Hall* and Gerald du Maurier did produce and act in it, but not for two years afterwards. There is such a thing as being too early with the news.

Some of the publicity men would take me with them to watch the early stages of rehearsals, and this I always found to be great fun. I remember Charles Cochran or some other revue producer taking me to a rehearsal of a revue in which Fred Astaire and his sister Adele (now Lady Charles Cavendish) were practising a new step. I have never seen anything more detailed or exciting than this rehearsal. I must have been there for three hours, and during the whole of that time Fred Astaire was trying over and over again to perfect about three steps. It is no wonder that he achieves mechanical perfection in the end. Standing by my side was a very pleasant-looking man introduced to me by Cochran as George Gershwin. I instantly gathered that he was an American, and to put him at his ease in a foreign country I said: "And what do you do? Write the lyrics?" This was just when his *Rhapsody in Blue* was exciting both hemispheres.

I remember meeting "Red" (Sinclair) Lewis walking along Piccadilly with a couple of very tough-looking men on either arm. Sinclair Lewis himself is pretty tough. When he last stayed with me he set himself and my house on fire. On this occasion he said: "Come along into Hatchard's. I want you to sign Hackett's new book." He introduced me to one of the toughs. It was Francis Hackett who had just become the Book Society's Choice of the Month with his history of *Henry VIII*.

So we entered Hatchard's and "Red" duly bought a copy of *Henry VIII* and we all signed it. I had already

been introduced to the other tough. So far as I heard "Red" he had said "Chrysler." "Same as the car," I said. He nodded. As he was entering his name under mine in the book I said: "You don't write by any chance?"

He shook his head. "No, I'm just a gentleman of leisure."

I read his signature. It was "Kreisler."

My only excuse for that *faux pas* must be the fact that music was the only criticism that I was spared. I suspect that the readers of the *Daily Graphic* must have been denied all musical criticism as I didn't do it. I still get invitations to Recitals. I have had to address Conferences of Musical Societies and propose the health of Constant Lambert at a Musical Festival, but apart from reviewing Russian Ballets and Grand Opera at Covent Garden I had not been called upon to betray my ignorance here. For the kind of music I did have to criticise, Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* and plays of that sort, were within the limits even of my understanding and appreciation. I frankly enjoyed revues, and it did nobody any harm to read my eulogies of Anita Elsom's and June's graceful dancing.

The worst part of my job as dramatic critic was to drive nails into coffins already hammered down. It is far easier to be rude than kind, as Agate well knows, and almost anybody can write a vituperative notice that will please everybody except the victim as we saw in the criticisms of Komisarjevsky's unfortunate version of *Antony and Cleopatra*. But I was once present at a play so bad that none of the actors could remember the order of their lines. It was called *Ashes* and the author was Lady Cathcart. I have never felt so unhappy in a public place. It was like watching a slow and deliberate murder.

I made, as many other critics and all racing experts do, many false judgments. I said that Eden Phillpott's *A Farmer's Wife* wouldn't run for five nights. It ran for five years.

I said that Ridley's *The Ghost Train* would be wrecked

in three nights, and never be heard of again. It is still being played all over the country.

I was present at the first night of *Pygmalion* when Mrs. Pat Campbell said "bloody" for the first time on any English stage. The audience was so horrified that they daren't look one another in the face. I sat behind Mrs. Pat Campbell a few years later at a play that deserved that epithet and she repeated it loudly, very loudly, at ten-second intervals. Nobody took the slightest notice. It had passed into the common currency. I am now wondering which of the many explicit words beginning with "b" is to be the next to pass into common currency.

One of the oddest persons I met in connection with the theatre was Philip Ridgeway who wore a cowboy's sombrero and side-whiskers. He asked me to luncheon one day just before launching his Barnes experiment. It pleased me mightily when he said: "Have you ever heard of a Russian called Tesschoff, or some such name? I'm told his *Cherry Orchard* is pretty good."

I not only agreed that his *Cherry Orchard* was very good, but hoped that he would be bold enough to give us a whole season of "Tesschoff." So it was owing to Philip Ridgeway that London was given the chance of enjoying *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Sea-Gull*.

I have always felt that Philip Ridgeway, who is a man of infinite charm, would make a tremendous success in Hollywood. I cannot think his experiment of broadcast revue is happy. He would be wiser to leave that to Sandy Powell.

In addition to meeting nearly all the famous playwrights, producers, actors and actresses of my time, and watching with pleasure some of them rise to fame in a night (Jessie Matthews for instance), I had of course also the pleasure of knowing most of the regular first-nighters and my colleagues, the other dramatic critics.

Quite rightly they didn't take much notice of me, because the *Daily Graphic* criticism had to be confined to half a dozen lines, but they were pleased to take notice

of my dress. In a theatre where every male is in white tie and tails a man with a Norfolk coat, Harris tweed scarf, heavy overcoat and half a dozen books under his arm is likely to attract notice. I felt that I was letting the dignity of the profession down, but as A. B. Walkley, looking exactly like an ambassador, gave me a kindly nod, I felt reassured. The rest might be angry, but they were flesh and blood. There was Bill Darlington, author of *Alf's Button*, educated at Shrewsbury and Cambridge, a genial, hard-working, conscientious and admirably safe judge of plays, there was Charles Morgan, of the Navy and Balliol, destined to be one of our most sensitive judges of a good play and a brilliant novelist, there was little J. M. Bulloch, a Scots doctor of literature who characteristically kept every theatre programme with the idea of bequeathing it to the British Museum. There was the smiling, ungainly, genial Cozens-Hardy, as restless as myself, E. A. Baughan as stolid as a rock, St. John Ervine, himself a first-rate playwright and novelist, speaking an Irish as musical as Shaw's, though of an entirely different brand; James Agate, bucolic, cherubic, bombastic, always railing against men and praising horses, at that time running a shop that failed, and writing a play that was no more successful, but attractive even in his gaucherie by virtue of his immense gusto; Hannen Swaffer, the darling of the gods, who seldom condescended to criticism but always kept his nose well poked-out for the news-value of the play. He was able to keep himself more in the limelight than the rest of the critics because he was constantly being refused admission to certain theatres, notably by Cochran. I cannot at this distance of time recall the reasons for his expulsion, which is a proof that they must have been trivial, but I do remember that he made the maximum amount of capital out of these adventures. I can remember very little about any of Swaffer's exploits beyond the fact that he always claimed any sensational national decision to be due entirely to his influence. It was Swaffer I remember who claimed to have closed the promenade at the "Empire." It is of course part of a

journalist's self-protective equipment to claim infallibility and self-importance, but there are times when I believe that Swaffer actually deceived himself into believing that he really was important. I did not read his account of the Abdication of the King. He has a counterpart in the United States in the person of Walter Winchell.

Ashley Dukes, the laughing author of *A Man with a Load of Mischief*, was perhaps the kindest-hearted as he was certainly the most scholarly of the dramatic critics. Willson Disher, who contrived to look exactly like Shakespeare, was the great authority on circuses. George Mair, who had married Maire O'Neill, was now editing "A Londoner's Diary" in the *Evening Standard* and looked more frail than ever.

In the audience were usually the white-haired picturesque Gordon Selfridge, to whose employees I used to lecture in the evenings on books, the Flatau sisters, the Cohen sisters, Miss Radclyffe Hall, Lady Louis Mountbatten, W. L. George and his wife, and of course a good sprinkling of actors and actresses.

After the play was over I had to dash in a taxi back to the office, write at lightning speed my critical judgment of the play, send it down to the "comps", and make a frantic dash for the last train to Brighton, which in those days left at 12.5.

At Brighton I had the choice between a two-mile walk or a ten-bob taxi fare. I usually walked.

The theatre of course took up only a little of my time. I had to arrange all the interviews and carry them out myself.

I interviewed Osbert Sitwell in bed. I used also to be a guest at his luncheon parties where I was sure to meet intelligent people like Nancy Cunard who were not desperately fighting to get into the news.

I interviewed Sanderson, the headmaster of Oundle, in bed several times. "My husband," said Mrs. Sanderson, "always goes to bed when you come. He finds it easier to take you lying down." H. G. Wells's two very

good-looking boys were there in those days, as was my publisher, Grant Richards', son.

My contacts with Royalty were few, but at Lord's as I was walking round one year I smiled graciously at our present Queen, and said as I passed: "You and I have met before somewhere, haven't we?" And she instantly smiled back and said:

"Yes, of course. How nice to see you again," which was not only quick of her, but characteristically kind.

The Duke of Kent was kind enough to send for me in the theatre one night in order to tell me how much he had enjoyed one of my novels.

One night, as I was coming out of the Prince of Wales Theatre, I spoke to someone whom I mistook for Ian Hay. It was Captain Robin Humphreys, and he asked me to go with him across the road to see a new restaurant he had taken over. I had known it in and after the War as the *Élysée*. He had re-christened it the *Café de Paris*, and was making a great success of it. To have supper and dance on the ground floor you had to be in evening dress, but anybody could go in and have supper in the balcony for a guinea and look down on the dance floor from above. The Duke of Windsor was frequently to be seen there, so it became the most popular fashionable resort, and Humphreys was able to buy himself a very lovely house near Ringmer. He later acquired the *Café Anglais* and the *Kitcat Club*. But these night shows are very tricky. The public taste is wayward.

I used to go a good deal to the *Metropole Follies* which were run by Clifford Whitley, the Co-optimist husband of a Co-optimist wife, Elsa Macfarlane. He now runs the cabaret at the *Dorchester* which relies for its pep and beauty and humour on America. In those days Whitley used to get his stars from France. I remember annoying one of them a good deal by an adverse notice that I gave her after one of these shows. All these French *diseuses* seemed to me to be like Gabrielle Delys, about whom I remember one thing only. I saw her come out of the county court that was opposite my

flat in North End Road having lost a claim about a portrait and slash the picture to ribbons with a large knife in the middle of the street to the great delight of the onlookers.

Major E. O. Leadlay, who is now Cochran's publicity manager, was at that time publicity manager for the Piccadilly Supper revue which was always popular because Jack Hylton's band was there. Henry Hall was at that time at Gleneagles.

It was very pleasant to have a free supper with as much champagne as I liked and nothing to pay either for oneself or one's dancing partner, but I found it on the whole, in spite of my love of food, drink, dancing, congenial society and pretty girls, a tiring and boring business. The reason was twofold.

The audience was always deadly, and the turns, other than the humorous ones, were none too good. The sort of people who can afford to throw away a fiver on shows of this sort are about as dumb as human beings can be. I looked in vain for one familiar intelligent face. They were usually fat, bald and repellent old men who used this as a means of "giving a good time" to those strange, hard-boiled young "gold-diggers" who accompanied them. Hilarity, if any, was forced, conversation little and stilted, enjoyment, if facial expression told for anything, was completely absent. It was a company of male morons and women out to get all that they could get.

Dancing was usually impossible owing to the fact that the floor could not contain the crowds who surged on to it together. The most confined space was at the Embassy Club, in those days under the management of Luigi. There were many less reputable night-clubs where lonely men were fleeced by the lowest riff-raff, but unless I was on the look-out for a particular story I did not frequent them.

I was also sent out of course on big news stories. I attended the army manœuvres as "Our Military Correspondent" and found myself attending pow-wows with the General Staff, and wandering in wind and rain

over Salisbury Plain with the corsair-like Hilaire Belloc, all huge black hat and flying cape, on one side of me and the tall, lean, ailing, scholarly Captain Liddell-Hart on the other.

I charged about over hill and dale on the back of a motor bicycle, most recklessly driven by Jarshé, prince of press photographers and good fellows, in the hope of seeing the Duke of Gloucester lead a charge on a horse.

I was bumped and hurled from side to side of a tank which appeared to me to be nothing but projecting knobs through the village of Nether Wallop, and I marched by the side of troops completely sodden with five days' unceasing rain.

My headquarters were in Winchester, but I seemed to spend my days being conveyed at terrific speed from one battle front to another without knowing any more than the staff officers did how engagements were progressing. The referees were always all over the place when nothing was happening and never to be found when there was hand-to-hand fighting in the streets. But everybody seemed to be enjoying himself, and when camp was struck two days early owing to waterlogging we were all genuinely sorry to go back to civil life.

I took out the first contingent of war widows with a little padre called Mullineux of the St. Barnabas Pilgrims, and owing to another sudden job had to miss the boat at Dover, so I had to catch them up by taking the Folkestone boat to Boulogne and then walking through the night from Boulogne to Calais. These pilgrimages brought me again into touch with the people of the industrial Midlands and North whom I was in some danger of forgetting on the staff of a London paper.

It is often held against the London Press that it is more provincial-minded than the provincial Press, and it is true that in Fleet Street we seemed to write for a specifically London type of reader. I was never convinced that this reawakening of grief caused by the actual sight of the grave of the dead husband, brother or son was a

good thing, but all the women we took over were full of gratitude for the chance.

I used to attend the pageant of the Lord Mayor's Show, and the very colourful and moving ceremony in the House of Lords of the King's Opening of Parliament which is the closest approximation to a scene out of *Alice in Wonderland* that occurs to-day. I had to attend the Armistice Celebrations in Whitehall for many years, and there discovered for the first time how many trees there are in London, for in the two minutes' silence all that I ever heard was the wind soughing through the branches of trees whose existence I noticed at no other time.

I watched the wedding procession of the present King from the streets and followed the funeral procession of Queen Alexandra along the snow-covered Mall on one of the coldest days I have ever known in London.

I followed the King's Naval Review at Spithead in a Press launch, and pulled at a rope on a racing yacht next to the then Secretary of State for the Dominions during Cowes Regatta. I was once hotly chased by the police out of the gardens of the Royal Yacht Squadron, into which I had somehow made my way to get a story out of Lord Birkenhead. They thought that I was making off with some jewels.

One of the scenes that I shall never forget was the tumultuous welcome to the King after his long illness when he appeared driving in the Park in an open carriage.

But the part of my job on the *Daily Graphic* that I liked most was the reporting of the social and sporting events.

I lunched every day in the Savoy Grill Room at the paper's expense, to get if possible a "scoop" story about some celebrity or other. Every foreign potentate and certainly every American film-star would naturally gravitate to the Savoy, and interviews would be granted with alacrity as publicity was naturally wanted by most of the visitors.

And every table at luncheon contained its notability or notoriety. The Duke of Westminster, to whom apparently I bear a strong likeness as I also do to Sir Seymour Hicks, was nearly always there. Sir Charles Higham had the same table every day. Michael Arlen used occasionally to appear, but my usual rendezvous for meeting him was in Hatchard's bookshop.

I remember one day climbing on to the outside of a bus—in those days buses were not covered in on top—and Michael objected to the little amount of room left for him to sit on in the front seat. So he turned to the occupant, a big truculent-looking fellow, and said loudly: "If you don't move up I'm going to throw you over the side of the bus." The man jumped as if he had been shot, and got up and went straight off the bus without a word.

Most of the regular Savoy lunchers were actresses, advertising agents, or publicity directors. Their extreme cordiality to each other was most fascinating to me to watch. Each new arrival would make a round of the tables, greeted by a chorus of, "Hallo, darling!" while miserable males rose uncertainly, napkin in hand, longing for a chance to get three consecutive mouthfuls, but the ritual had to be observed. You would have thought that these people had not set eyes on each other for a year and had just returned from China or India. In point of fact they had all met the night before at a first-night, and they would all meet again at a first-night that night, but apparently during the intervening hours something of world-shattering importance had happened and "Have you heard?" and "Definitely" and "Not really?" and "Oh, Darling, you couldn't" rose from every side.

I sometimes preferred the acting that I saw in the Savoy to that which I saw on the stage. It was much more convincing.

Between the opening of the Academy and the last day of Cowes life was one long thrill of delight. To be privileged not only to attend all the social functions of

the London Season, but to be paid for so doing, and to have the best seats reserved was indeed to spoil one for ever after.

As art critic I was of course expected to pronounce on the pictures in the Academy and I was given a free hand. But I had as well to write news-stories of the spectators at the Private View, and indeed the whole tone of Piccadilly altered for the better as elderly ladies from remote country manor houses tottered into Burlington House in the clothes that were fashionable when Lily Langtry was a girl.

I usually managed to go round in the company of Henry Rushbury or Osbert Sitwell. But it was much more a ceremony of making luncheon and dinner engagements than of looking at pictures.

At the Chelsea Flower Show I had for one day to become knowledgeable about flowers, and here I found one advantage of having been a Public School master.

My old pupils kept on cropping up in unexpected and useful places. A boy called Cutbush who had been in my form at Tonbridge was a son of one of the most famous flower-growers. So from him I was able to get a few technical details that other reporters might miss. The Flower Show brought up from the remotest corners of the country, from vicarage, cottage, farm and manor house an even stranger contingent of visitors than the Academy. These made the Londoner seem very exotic, artificial and even foreign. I know nothing about gardening, but I felt that it must indeed be, as Bacon said, one of the purest of human pleasures, to judge from the faces of those who practise it.

For a few days after each Chelsea Show I would imitate the fashion of my employer and wear, even as Camrose did, a white gardenia each day in my buttonhole. In point of fact the Editor's Secretary used to take pleasure in making our desks as redolent of sweet scents and colours as the B.B.C.

Next came the Derby to which I went by train, motor bus, or private car armed with a Press pass that took

me to the Paddock and Grand Stand and everywhere else I wished. The Derby provided me with plenty of material. I sometimes went down the night before to get a good gipsy story. I knew nothing about the chances of the horses, and in any case we had, I believe, our own "racing expert." But there was always a story in Lord Lonsdale's yellow coach and long cigar, in Steve Donoghue's strong attraction for the crowd who yelled "Come on, Steve," in the "welshing" bookie, and in some lucky sweepstake winner. But nothing so spectacular as a suffragette throwing herself under the feet of the horses as they came round Tattenham Corner came to my notice, and the only thing I can remember of the Derby was once asking a card-seller to get me change for a ten-shilling note.

One buys experience dearly.

I used to run across from the start to the hill above the winning-post to see the race. But that was more a desire to escape being wedged into the rails than a desire to see the race.

I much preferred Ascot. Everything about Ascot thrilled me from the yellow gorse on the Heath to the riot of geraniums in the Royal Box, from the sleek, well-groomed men to their really lovely partners. Each day at Ascot passed like a flash. I never found time to go into any of the Club tents to luncheon, though once I did accept the Ranee of Sarawak's invitation to go across the road to luncheon at her house, but even then in spite of the charm of herself and her daughters I resented missing a minute of the scene.

Indeed Ascot is really the apex of London's social activities. People really look their best in this out-of-door setting, and the weather is nearly always ideal, warm without being oppressive, the colours at their freshest, and the spectators not yet jaded by too many late nights in succession.

I used to have an annual competition with A. P. Herbert to see which of us could be the more noticeably untidy. He won on his Homburg, which was the oldest and most disreputable hat I ever saw, and I won on the

bags of oranges and bananas that I used to carry about. I had to take my food when and where I could.

Then there were golden afternoons watching polo at Hurlingham and Ranelagh, and unforgettably exciting lawn tennis matches at Wimbledon. Those were the days before it was realised that a girl could both be a sportswoman of championship rank and look lovely. There was no temptation then to lose one's heart to anything beyond their courage and their skill, but to-day the lissomness, grace and good features of the girl champions are as striking as their play.

My surprise on first meeting Kay Stammers was as great as that on my first setting eyes on Beryl Markham. Kay Stammers is almost frail and Beryl Markham looks as if she were more at home in a ball-room than in the cockpit of an aeroplane.

Henley came to me as something of an anticlimax. It lacked the excitement of Wimbledon and the grace of Ascot. In spite of the general opinion I do not think that girls are at their best on the river.

At Lord's, however, I recovered the thrills of Ascot. The 'Varsity match made up in genial companionship what it lacked in dressiness, and the Eton and Harrow match more than made up in smartness and beauty for its occasional lack of geniality. In neither match was the cricket of the slightest interest. Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin always turned up to that function and George Robey flaunted his M.C.C. tie to our no little envy.

I never sat in the "Rovers" stand, even when some mysterious stranger handed me his ticket. I found it more fascinating to stand on the mound by the Pavilion and watch the entrancing procession of young things passing to and fro in their flimsy frocks of chiffon and organdi.

It was entirely the crowd that made Lord's so amusing. I never went near the ground at any other time, nor luckily was it any part of my job to go trailing round from Bramhall Lane to Old Trafford, or from the Oval to Trent Bridge to follow the fortunes of the counties.

Once only was I despatched on a cricket news

story, and that was when Hobbs was daily expected to beat W. G. Grace's record of, I forget how many centuries. I was sent down to Hove to interview him, and arrived just when the players were changing. I went into the Professionals' pavilion and saw a number of men all of whom looked exactly the same to me.

"And which of you gentlemen," I said, "is Hobbs?"

The silence that fell could only be paralleled by that of a congregation watching one of their number steal the Crucifix from the Altar during Divine Service.

Some time in July a combined Oxford and Cambridge athletic team would compete against Harvard and Yale, or Princeton and Cornell at the White City and that meant a pleasant reunion with runners of my time, and the delight of watching youngsters beating old records.

Owing to the efforts of Bevill Rudd, Noel Baker, Harold Abrahams, E. A. Montague, and Evan Hunter, who are the backbone of the Achilles Club, the standard of University athletics is enormously improved since the War. There is much more enthusiasm in the Universities, and teams are for ever travelling to Hungary, South Africa, the United States and other parts of the globe to run against other universities.

Of the post-war athletes D. G. A. Lowe the barrister, Henry Stallard the famous eye specialist, Jack Lovelock the New Zealand doctor, Harold Abrahams the barrister, Lord Burghley the politician, and A. G. K. Brown stand out almost as much for their remarkable modesty and skill as for their unusual fleetness of foot.

The King's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace was a sign that the season was nearing its end. I had not realised before I attended it how wild and spacious are the grounds of the Palace. Behind the big lake are uncultivated wooded pleasancess that give a real country air to the surroundings, and the traffic hum sounds very far away.

After the Garden Party came Goodwood in a setting even lovelier in wildness though less colourful than

Ascot, and of course less dressy. But the great woods where no birds sing and the wide view down over Chichester Cathedral to the Solent and the distant hills of the Isle of Wight made up to some degree for that.

But it meant for me the scattering of the people I had come to like to the four winds, to Scotland, to Ireland, to Norway, to America. Only Cowes remained, the loveliest of all when the great yachts bellied down the Solent under full sail.

Between May and August it was difficult to find room in the paper for even the most colourful description. In August it was even more difficult to find anything to say at all. When the papers talk about London being empty they mean that it actually is empty from their point of view. All the people who are in the news have gone. Those who remain have no news-value. August is the month of the country visitor, and we had to rely on reports of educational conferences to whip a flagging reader's appetite. Staffs were at half strength, as those who had prior claim and children home from school naturally took their holidays in that month.

I disliked August in London almost as much as London Sundays. No new books were published, and there were few new shows. The picture-galleries and sales-rooms were shut. The restaurants were empty. The big houses had their blinds down. I used to pine to get home for my evening bathe to wash off the combination of hot tar and petrol that seemed to cling to me.

Life passed pleasantly along with articles and news stories of mine on almost every page of every issue of the *Daily Graphic* until May, 1926, when all work was momentarily paralysed by the General Strike. I remember cordons drawn round the newspaper offices, but we managed somehow or other to get through, and somehow we produced a skeleton paper which was printed, I believe, in Northampton.

We carried on.

In October, 1926, we carried on no longer. We were all summarily dismissed. The *Daily Graphic* ceased

publication. We received the first and only intimation of this on the Friday afternoon that the Saturday issue on which we were all feverishly at work would be the last.

I remember that my first feeling was one of extreme sorrow that the sketch of the lady under the umbrella was doomed to disappear. I had known and loved her ever since I was a boy. It didn't matter so much to me. I had only served the paper for three years. There were compositors who had served the paper for thirty-three years.

Some were lucky in being absorbed into the *Daily Sketch* with which the *Daily Graphic* then merged. I was not one of them.

Chapter IX

THE "DAILY TELEGRAPH," 1927-1930

AFTER three months of unemployment, I became leader-writer to the *Daily Telegraph*. I owed this to the good offices of Sir Theodore Cook, who wrote a glowing letter on my behalf to Lord Burnham.

At my interview with Lord Burnham he asked me one question only.

"What did you take in Schools?" he asked.

"Two Thirds," I replied.

"I took two Firsts," he said rather proudly.

It is the only occasion that I can remember my degree helping me. When Lord Beaverbrook asked me where I was educated I replied, "Oxford." "Forget it!" he said, and I promptly did. It was good advice. I wish some of the B.B.C. announcers would profit from it.

The *Daily Telegraph* office was as spacious and quiet and light as the *Daily Graphic* office had been cabined, noisy and dark. There was a great dignity about the building, and no one was ever in a hurry, the Editor, Arthur E. Watson, least of all. He was the most completely imperturbable journalist I ever met, and I think the kindest. He had time to listen to everybody's grievances, and made it his personal business to see them rectified.

I was given a large room to share with Bill Darlington, the dramatic critic, a scholar after the best Salopian tradition, a sound cricketer, and a wit. His dramatic judgments were well balanced, and never merely exhibitions of his own verbal dexterity. He was an excellent companion, always cheerful, and never harassed.

At the next table sat C. B. Mortlock, the only parson I ever encountered in Fleet Street. He too was a dramatic critic and in control of the ecclesiastical news. He

somehow managed to run a parish as well. I have seldom met a more indefatigable worker. He did occasional leaders.

A young man just down from Oxford with a brilliant first in Greats and one highbrow novel already to his credit sat opposite to me. He also did occasional leaders. His name was Montagu Slater.

The senior leader writers had studies of their own. J. B. Firth was the mainstay of the paper, a rubicund, indomitably cheerful scholar, with an enviable command of English and strongly Conservative views. He had in earlier days written a memorable volume on Derbyshire in the Highways and Byways Series.

His second in command was E. C. Bentley, the author of that most famous of all detective stories, *Trent's Last Case*. He was much less cheerful than Firth by reason of his health, which was never very good.

When these two giants had had their pickings of the main news, Mortlock and Slater and I would be sent for to see what we had to suggest as third and fourth leaders.

Mine seems to have been a roaming commission, for I remember writing on tipsters, bells, smells, old maps, noise, sheep-dogs, and on all literary open-air topics. I particularly made a bid for centenaries and deaths. Meredith, Hardy and Blake were all apportioned to me during my leader-writing period. It was work that I liked doing, because it seemed very much worth doing. I was given any amount of space and quite often a reasonable amount of time. I still consider my leader on "The Ladies of Llangollen" the most finished piece of writing that I have yet achieved.

On the other hand I often was given very little time in which to become authoritative on subjects of which I knew nothing.

I had by this time got accustomed to moving quickly, but I felt the strain of being given such a subject as Argentine meat at five o'clock and be expected to have pronounced authoritatively on it three hours later on the strength of a Blue Book report, a news telegram and

the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. I have particular reason to remember Argentine meat because the next morning, to my dismay, I had to listen to my own leader being quoted by a stockbroker in the train as a valuable guide to the trend of the meat-market. I have always felt a little doubtful of the infallibility of stockbrokers since that day. And of leader-writers.

It took me some little time to get used to writing leaders of policy, because the news-story on which the leader was based appeared to me to contain all that was necessary, and I saw no reason to suppose that a repetition of that story in leader columns could possibly interest anybody. But from what I could gather the good leader-writer retold the news-story in his first paragraph in such a way as to hide the fact that he was recapitulating news, and then continued in his second somewhat pontifically or sententiously to tell the reader what all right-thinking men and women ought to feel about it and how they ought to act.

There were subjects of course—education was one—where I wanted to be didactic, but on most leader subjects there seemed to me no cause for such finality of opinion as I was called upon to offer. That is why I was grateful when I was relegated to write the leader that didn't at all affect the nation's purse or politics, but merely sought to entertain or to inform his literary taste. This work was wholly enjoyable because it meant a search into my mind for an original thought or turn of phrase and a general browsing among the books in the library for apt illustration. It was not done at break-neck speed. My leaders could be held over from one day to another. They didn't date.

In addition to leaders I was invited to contribute general articles to the leader page. Naturally these articles usually fell into one of two groups. They were either concerned with the open-air and the delights of the countryside at different seasons or they celebrated the centenary of some great writer or the appearance of some outstanding book.

Twice a week I was called upon to contribute about a couple of columns of book reviews.

This entailed discussion that often grew heated with the Literary Editor, a Scot from Kingussie called Mackintosh, of astonishing learning, who spent all his waking hours that were not spent in the office in the British Museum. His mind was not only scholarly but almost Macaulayesque in its powers of retention. It was nearly always quicker to go straight to him with a question than it was to look it up in the reference books.

All the new books came first to him, and it was his business to apportion them to the right quarters. Mortlock would naturally have all the ecclesiastical books, Liddell Hart the military histories, Darlington the drama, Firth the political memoirs, and so on.

I had more or less the first pick of the fiction and poetry and general literature. Mackintosh's contention was that I wanted far too many books. The *Daily Telegraph* custom was that unless the book was wanted for the permanent shelves of the library the reviewer had the right to keep his review copies. This enabled me to build up the foundations of a quite sound library of books on the English countryside and of the best in modern fiction.

I began to enjoy myself prodigiously. I have always resented having to spend sunny hours indoors, and while I was on the *Telegraph* it wasn't necessary for me to be there till four o'clock, and I was at liberty to go home when my leader was finished. I did my reading for reviews in the train where at that time of day I had the compartment to myself.

The room in which I worked was quiet. I was given plenty of space and seldom cut down.

Occasionally for the sake of variety I was sent out on a news story, and probably the peak of my success as a reporter was reached when I was given two full columns describing how I failed to see the total eclipse of the sun



The Broadcaster visits a listening school



En route for America

on Snowdon in June, 1929. Every newspaper had got very excited about this eclipse and sent correspondents to places all over the world to get special stories.

Snowdon was one of the most favoured places. We were assured that we should see something that nobody else saw if we could contrive to be at the top of the mountain at four o'clock in the morning. We all got there days before to do trial trips. On one of these I encountered a Hungarian astronomer leading his wife down the only really difficult descent to be found from the top. She was wearing high-heeled shoes.

On the morning of the eclipse we set out in complete darkness and drenching rain in the tiny train that climbs from Llanberis. It was the most cheerless night expedition I have ever undertaken. There was a contingent of school children who had come all the way from Sussex. They were bitterly disappointed for we were in the train when the eclipse took place. The blackness changed to a completely terrifying pall of purple and the air became icy, deathly cold.

I, as a sun-worshipper, was made to feel as never before how dependent man is on the sun's rays. All our faces turned a sort of repulsive moss-green. Our teeth were chattering with the cold. In the purple light we could see drenched stragglers faltering up the mountain track. Then from nowhere came a miniature tornado and nearly swept the train off the edge of the high precipice.

Fear roused us from our stupor and caused our blood to circulate once more. When we arrived at the hut at the top our one cry was for a warming drink. The word eclipse wasn't popular. And yet at Giggleswick the sightseers had a superb view.

I very nearly didn't send in a report at all, but on my way south to the office I whiled away the hours in the train trying to make an entertaining story, and when I got to the office I found to my intense surprise that they were delighted with it and proposed to use it in its entirety.

I have only once seen Watson more pleased with an

article of mine, and that was entitled "If you want to lose your way, take a map," an ironical article on map-reading.

It was a great relief not to have to contribute gossip, because I was now able to concentrate on the real news end of the big sales at Sotheby's and Christie's, and I had the further advantage of the companionship on these journeys of A. C. R. Carter, the *Daily Telegraph* sales expert, a generously-built man with a flowing moustache and most courtly manners who was princely in his kindness to all junior members of the staff. He used to take me as his guest to the monthly reunion dinners of the Old Boys of Bradford Grammar School, a school that included among its pupils Delius, Sir Frank Dyson, Humbert Wolfe, and J. B. Firth, as well as my friend Carter.

Indeed the whole staff of the *Daily Telegraph* was a very happy family.

We had an attractive dining-room on the top floor and I preferred the companionship of my colleagues there to that of any club in London.

During my three years on the paper the whole building was taken down and rebuilt much more grandly about our ears. New rotary printing-presses were installed, and I was detailed to write a descriptive article of their functions for a special supplement. I was also detailed to spend a good deal of time in research in the obituary room, revising the lives of those famous men and women who might be expected to die shortly. During the long illness of King George, I was at work on his biography.

I was given social functions in the season to describe, and once more mingled with the crowds at Ascot and Lord's as a note-taking observer.

But my happiness on the *Telegraph* was enhanced enormously by my happiness at home. I joined the staff of the *Telegraph* in April 1927, and in August 1927 I

moved a few miles along the coast from Hove to the village of Southwick.

I have never been wholly at ease in a town. Houses block both the sun and the air. Traffic noises distract me at night. Southwick possessed the, to me, priceless asset of a village green, and facing that green quietness I found a two-storeyed knapped-flint hall built in 1691 to be let at £100 a year. I lived there for five years, and seem to have spent most of those years basking in the sun under the front-door porch.

I did nearly all my work out of doors to the tuneful accompaniment of village children playing cricket, children on the swings, children see-sawing, and of old men on the benches humming tunes of long ago in the warm sunlight.

Every morning before breakfast I would walk up the chalk lane at the top of the village that led me to an ancient stone called “Rest and Be Thankful.” Here I would pause to say my morning prayers looking down over the sleeping valley to the sunlit sea, and across the smooth cup of Downland, where the lord of the manor grazed his Jerseys, to a strangely eerie hedge called “Crooked Moon.”

At this point the downland larks began their choruses. Larks sang above the shore, but no larks sang above the village until I reached this three-hundred-foot contour at “Rest and Be Thankful.” Above this point they were never silent the whole year through.

Usually too, a single magpie, whom I christened Christopher Sly, would be waiting perched on the fence, and fly a little ahead of me like an outrider until I reached the open downland overlooking Cock-o'-Roost where I used to see big red foxes streak across the rides between the thick covers of flaming gorse.

If I had time and felt energetic I contrived to reach the top of Thundersbarrow, an early British earthwork standing nearly six hundred feet above the tiny harbour-mouth. Here were still traces of trenches dug in the War and a long deep cavern holed out of the chalk which could just be explored if I took off coat

and waistcoat and wriggled through the narrow opening.

This was a grand early morning walk at all times of the year, grand in the early Spring when the speedwell first opened its eyes of vivid blue among the stubble, grand when the deeper blue of the swallow dipping over the dew pond heralded the coming of the warmth, but grandest of all in June when all the soft green smooth sward was carpeted with the mauve of the wild thyme and the yellow of ladies' slipper.

I have always found the early morning the best time for thinking, but on these early walks over the downs I did more shouting and singing for pure happiness than any connected thinking. These downs invariably swept away my cares and filled me with a sense of deep gratitude for the loveliness of life. And they certainly gave me an appetite.

After breakfast I would settle down in my shirt-sleeves in a garden-chair with a long plank perched on its arms piled with books and manuscript, and I would begin my daily work in the sun on the steps of the porch. It wasn't always easy to concentrate because of the passing pageant.

I never found myself interested in the passers-by in Hove, but in Southwick I was quickly made to feel that I was a member of a self-contained community, every one of whom mattered to everybody else. Everybody greeted everybody else after the immemorial custom of villagers. Instead of being just atoms of humanity, everybody became highly individualised. There was one old, thin woman in carpet slippers and long straggling beard who furtively crossed and recrossed the Green with her string-bag morning after morning never once looking up from the ground to right or left or acknowledging any salutation. She was the only person who didn't.

There was the tall, good-looking, dark girl who glided past with shoulders erect and stiff precisely at nine o'clock, one o'clock, two o'clock and six o'clock on her way to and from her office or meal.

There was the old doctor in a massive Norfolk coat, that looked as if it ought to be full of rabbits, who was regarded with great veneration because he was generally believed to have invented colour-photography.

There was the mysterious Grange where Buddhist rites were observed, and the only less mysterious hostel for the brothers of St. Francis.

We were a very proud community.

Visitors were immediately taken to the creeper-covered dairy known as Charles II's cottage. It was from our harbour that he escaped to France after his defeat at Worcester, but no one seemed quite to know what part was played by this cottage.

There was the recently excavated Roman villa. There was the jolly companionable house where Sir John Reith, stationed here in the War, met and married his bride. There was the cottage where Clara Butt was born, now honoured with a plaque. There were Sussex cricketers of great and glorious memory, among them Joe Stannard, Juniper and Mercer who had learnt to play the game on the Green.

The Green was the centre of all our activities. It was here that the village cricket Eleven played on Wednesday evenings in the dim light and on Saturday afternoons. It was here that the village band played on Sundays after Evensong, that the children held their school sports, the folk dancers and gymnasts their displays, and the girls played Stool-ball.

It was here that the old men played out their days sitting on the benches in the sun with their dogs at their feet.

It was here that the village boys and girls rode round and round in the evenings on their bicycles or stopped at the railings to flirt and gossip.

It was here that cottage women would swiftly pass with jugs half-hidden under shawls to the “Cricketers’ Arms” and children race noisily to the sweet-shop next door to get far more for their money than their money warranted from the white-haired gracious lady who owned it.

It was here that the stout fishmonger with stentorian voice used to call his wares so loudly that I could hear him from the top of Thundersbarrow.

It was here that small urchins squirted each other from the pump that commemorated Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and chased each other round the War Memorial. On certain days at half-past two there were the slow, sad processions of mourners and the beribboned cars of the newly married.

All life passed before me as I read and wrote, the usual mingling quickly with the unusual, the rector going slowly blind, the headmaster with a strangely incongruous bowler walking quickly past so near the wall as almost to touch it, the young headmistress wobbling off her bicycle to ask if I had got this or that new book, a stranger hesitating at the garden-gate to ask where the church or harbour was.

It was the one disadvantage of the Green that we couldn't see the sea. We could only hear it, and sometimes smell what the polite called the ozone.

At noon I made no pretence of doing any more work. If the weather was warm I would fetch my bathing-costume and we would go down to the beach to bathe.

But warm or cold we would go to the beach. This entailed crossing the Brighton-Worthing railway line, and the main street, a very shoddy and dangerous thoroughfare. But beyond it rose the masts of many yachts drawn alongside Courtenay and Birkett's quay in the canal. To reach the sea we had to cross the canal over the lock-gates or by ferry, and there was always some activity to give us pause, a Scandinavian timber ship, a French potato-boat, a Dutch barge, a collier, an oil-tanker, or a little private yacht going in or out. And on the sea side of the canal was a strangely attractive waste-land where still stood the bases of those honeycomb-like towers of concrete and iron that were to be towed out in mid-channel as observation posts for enemy submarines.

Water now flowed in and out among the hollow

hexagons and anglers fished for dabs, and we kept an eagle eye open for the flash past of the deep red breast and sky-blue wing of the solitary kingfisher who held sway over this narrow channel. Wild flowers grew in fine profusion in the shingle, sea-pinks, viper's bugloss, and deadly nightshade. In winter when the weather was very severe the grey geese sought sanctuary here, but the gunmen soon got wind of stray wild duck and brent-geese and their lives were short.

This channel was spanned by a broken-down bridge and a dam built below the observation towers. Then came the camel's back of shingle on the other side of which dipped the shingle beach with groynes about seventy yards apart to hold the beach in place. The groynes provided us with admirable places on which to hang our clothes when we undressed, and even more admirable protection from the wind.

The temptation to lie in the sun and let the world go by was overwhelming. The more sensible villagers used to bring their midday meals down to the beach in a bag and spend the whole day from sunrise to sunset browning their bodies and letting their children, as well as their dogs, enjoy the freedom of the shore. There was sand at low tide in which the tiniest children revelled. It was a safe sea even for non-swimmers, as at low tide you could walk out for three hundred yards without going out of your depth, and there was no undercurrent. At high tide you could dive off the posts of the groynes like the cormorants, into ten or twelve feet of water, and except for hot Saturdays and Sundays we could count on having a whole groyne, if not the whole beach, to ourselves.

It was so enchanting a place that I always found it hard to tear myself away to go home to lunch, but there were compensations, for after lunch almost every day I received a call from a bibliophile who lived in the village and made his money by scouring round the countryside picking up old editions of famous authors cheap. I owe to him my passion for first editions, a hobby that need not be so expensive as people are apt to

imagine, and sometimes, if you are knowledgeable, is indeed a good investment. Whether my investments in books have been good financially or not I am not prepared to say, but they have undoubtedly been good æsthetically.

Reading an author in an early edition is to me a rare treat. I didn't realise before I acquired *The Opium Eater*, *Gulliver's Travels*, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *The Compleat Angler* in early editions how dainty was their original size.

The trouble is of course that once you begin to collect old editions you want to collect the really rare first editions, each of which may very well cost a fortune. Collecting old books is in some respects like collecting old furniture.

I was now living in an old house, and I began to go round the antique shops in search of furniture to suit it. This meant that I was for ever buying and exchanging, gradually discarding my modern stuff for the really old. This again was expensive. Luckily we lived simply. We had no car. Our jaunts into the heart of Sussex to follow hounds were made by bus or train.

Annual holidays became a means of adding to income owing to the fact that the railway companies began to hire me to write brochures. I found it easy to obtain leave of absence to fulfil lecture engagements all over the country. Indeed I seemed to be earning my £1,000 a year too easily. Then came a sudden and totally unexpected change.

Lord Burnham sold the *Daily Telegraph* to Lord Camrose, so I once more came under his control. As he had killed the *Daily Graphic* I felt a little apprehensive lest he should kill the *Daily Telegraph*.

Instead, he improved it out of all knowledge. He altered its size, its type and its whole appearance. He revitalised it and re-housed it magnificently. Its circulation rose from 140,000 to 540,000.

He gave a dinner party for the staff, and told us that he intended to retain us all. We breathed more freely for the first time for months, but I not quite so easily as under the old régime. My forebodings were justified.

On 19th November, 1930, I received the following letter from Mr. Watson :

“DEAR MAIS,

“As you know, we are looking for economies, like other people in Fleet Street. I very much regret to say that the changes affect you, and necessitate the termination of your contract. You will believe me when I say that I find it very hard to tell you this, for our relations have always been good and I have found you a pleasant, willing and industrious colleague.”

So I was once more on the road, put there twice running by the same employer.

It was my last regular job.

Chapter X

FREE LANCE

“WE don’t see you in Fleet Street much these days.”

“No,” I agreed.

“Glad to be out of it, no doubt?”

“In a way. Yes. Mainly because when the sun shines I go out in it.”

“Lucky devil. I envy you that. It must be grand to be able to choose your own work hours.”

“On the other hand I envy you a regular salary.”

“Perhaps, but doesn’t the very fact that you’ve got to be earning money give your work a better quality?”

“It means that I earn more money unless I get lazy, but there is a great deal of truth in Doctor Johnson’s statement that every man would be idle if he could. I like putting off my work until the last possible moment.”

“Like paying a bill. Who doesn’t? But surely you find it a pleasant change only to write about the things that interest you after being turned on to every conceivable topic, palatable or unpalatable.”

“It was a good discipline to have to take an interest in unpalatable topics.”

“You say that now.”

“And I mean it now. To be master of one subject means too much repetition.”

“But you won’t deny that it’s both pleasant and lucrative to be master of one subject.”

“Are you suggesting that I am?”

“Well, you’ve made a fair corner in the English countryside.”

“You mean I *know* a fair corner of the English countryside.”

"Well, I've heard you described as 'The Ambassador of the English Countryside.'"

"Only in after-dinner speeches, where a man is no more upon oath than he is in lapidary inscriptions."

"Well, everybody regards you as the man who really knows his own country."

"That doesn't mean that I am asked to write about it. Last year while I was wandering around Northumberland I was run to ground in a remote pele earth by the representative of a syndicate who wanted me to do a series of articles on the finest twelve heroic figures in history."

"So you turned it down?"

"I certainly did not. I never turn any offer down if the money's good."

The *Radio Times* turned me on suddenly to do articles on steel and the Coronation. It was my business to make myself more completely *au fait* with steel than any Sheffield blast-furnace worker and more exact about the Coronation than the College of Arms.

It is the business of a free lance to adapt himself to any audience. When I playfully alluded to a "field full of bulls" in my hunting reports for *Horse and Hound* I got a forcible reminder that humour should be reserved for humorous papers.

"You seem to be catholic in your range. I see articles by you in the high-brow quarterlies and in the cheap weeklies. Doesn't it lower your stock with the august *Nineteenth Century* to find their contributors writing for *Tit-Bits*?"

"I think if you look carefully you will find that the quality of writing in *Tit-Bits* is every bit as good as it is in any of the quarterlies, and the pay is infinitely better. I've always found the editors of the popular cheap papers much harder to please and much more inclined to pay handsomely for what they want. The half-crown magazines will accept ponderous platitudes from great names. The twopenny weeklies can't afford a dull paragraph."

"I notice that you don't do as much book-reviewing as you used to."

"It isn't worth it. I'll tell you why. Aldous Huxley once said that after a year of dramatic criticism he would be prepared to go into an asylum, and certainly something very strange happens to the judgment and temper of dramatic critics, but book-reviewing would not drive me into an asylum. It would drive me into a workhouse. Book-reviewing is a thankless job unless you are amassing a library on some special subject where the text-books are too expensive to buy.

"It takes a long time to read a book. You are given very little space to do justice to it. Your monetary recompense usually lies in the price you get for it when you have finished with it, which is only noticeable when you have a bagful of two-guinea biographies to dispose of. The usual rates are half price for non-fiction review copies, and half a crown each for novels. Poetry is regarded as valueless. One day I took in a bagful of books to the man who buys my review copies and the bill came to 19s. 6d. I had also a slim volume of poems. I had only just glanced at it. The paper didn't want a review of it. The bookseller said: 'It's no good to me.' 'Just to make up the quid,' I said. Being in generous mood he handed me over a one-pound note. I looked at the title of the book. It was *When We Were Very Young*. In three months the price of that volume had gone up to £40. I have been loath ever since then to part with any of my review copies, but it is an uncertain market. Galsworthy first editions went racing up and I held on. They fell as quickly as they rose and I've still got mine.

"To enjoy book-reviewing you must be a don, or a schoolmaster, or enjoy a good private income. It is delightful to be paid for reading what you want to read, and for saying about a book what you want to say, but the average free-lance journalist who has to make so many pounds a week must look for quicker returns than come from criticism unless he gets a retaining fee. Then he is no longer a true free lance. He will make more money by sending in daily paragraphs to the gossip-writer of each paper."

"Have you ever tried that?"

"After being a regular gossip-writer I can think of no worse way of making money than of submitting paragraphs about one's friends at five bob a time."

"You putting writing advertisements higher?"

"I put writing advertisements highest. When I was a regular journalist I adopted without thinking the average snobbish idea that copy-writing for advertising simply wasn't done. To-day I do as much as I possibly can. It is highly paid. It has got to be very well done because of the high price that the advertiser has to pay for space. I have even done it over the air."

He looked seriously shocked.

"You don't mean to say that you approve of wireless advertising?"

"If it is done efficiently and with taste I entirely approve of it. I really can't see any difference between the series of articles that I wrote on Great Historic Figures of the Past for a Scottish Sunday newspaper and the Great Heroic Figures of the Present about whom I broadcast for Scott's Emulsion at Luxembourg."

"Don't you find it a strain going all that way for a four-minute talk?"

"All that way? Oh, I don't go to Luxembourg. The talks are recorded in a studio at Hampstead. As each record only takes four minutes I used to be able to get through three or four talks at every visit. I think this is an excellent form of free-lancing. In point of fact it is now almost entirely confined to records of dance bands, but there'll soon be a demand for an extension of interests. I've always enjoyed my free-lance work in advertising more than any other."

"How did you begin?"

"With the Great Western Railway. They wanted their guides to Devon and Cornwall revised. I asked to be allowed to rewrite them on the understanding that I didn't treat either county from the railway angle at all, but solely on its own merits. 'The point is,' I said to the Director of Publicity, 'to get the public to want to visit Devon and Cornwall. Whether by car or aeroplane

doesn't matter. They'll use the train either to get there or when they get there. The main business is to popularise the counties.' So off I set to explore the two counties afresh, and to write as comprehensive a guide as I could. I spent an entire summer holiday exploring the churches, bathing coves, rivers, roads, tors, moors, village inns, manor houses, hotels, footpaths, ancient crosses, kistvaens, cromlechs, lych ways and so on, and I went home to write the best book I could write. The fact that it was an advertisement never entered my head.

"Indeed the only difference between this and any other book that I had written was that in this instance I was not paid a royalty on each copy, but a lump sum at the rate of so many guineas per thousand words. As each of these guides has now sold over 100,000 copies I should have been a rich man if I had accepted the most insignificant royalty.

"But it is the custom of advertisers to buy out the copyright.

"Having made a success of my first railway venture I found myself in demand among all the four great railway systems. I was despatched by the L.M.S. to write a brochure on North Wales and the Royal Scot, by the L.N.E.R. to describe their 'Cruising Belle,' and by the Southern Railway to do all sorts of amusing things. Take a look at that."

I handed him a railway handbill. It was a pink leaflet. There is a reproduction of it on the next page.

He handed it back with a grunt.

"That was ingenious. How did it pan out?"

"We expected, at the outside, forty. One thousand four hundred and forty turned up. It took four trains. It was a tribute to the Southern Railway's powers of persuasion, for the moon had sunk below the horizon long before our arrival and the sun refused to rise to order. It was a very startling occasion, for I was called upon at four in the morning on the top of Chanctonbury to explain the absence of sun and moon. I felt like Bottom. Still it was a memorable experience. I've never been allowed to forget it.

“The Southern Railway found that they were on a good thing, so they continued the guided rambling idea as a regular feature. I was paid very highly to conduct train-loads of ramblers in the daylight Sunday after

EXPERIENCE THE NOVEL THRILL of watching a summer dawn from the first streaks to the full sunrise.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

A MOONLIGHT WALK!

OVER THE SOUTH DOWNS

TO WITNESS

SUNRISE FROM
CHANCTONBURY RING

With Mr. S.P.B. MAIS (of Wireless Fame)

On SATURDAY (NIGHT) 16th JULY

Special Supper and Breakfast Car Train

TO STEYNING

FORWARD	Return	RETURN
	Fare	
Saturday	(3rd Class)	Sunday
Night.		Morning.

	Midnt.	s.	d.		a.m.
Victoria				Steypning	
dep.	12	10	4	dep.	7 20

Sunday through the by-lanes of Kent, Surrey and Sussex. My duties were simply to make myself affable to as many or few people as I liked. I used to walk down the train *en route* distributing leaflets on litter, choice of routes and so on, engaging in conversation anybody who wanted

to talk to me. We used to get a regular contingent of about four hundred. They were a very pleasant community, mainly young, anxious for a hard day's exercise. I disapprove of people walking in gangs, and said so. I disapprove of girls hiking in shorts because they are unbecoming, and I said so. I disapprove of people walking fast because they cannot see what they have come out to see, and I said so. I disapprove of people following a trail when they ought to be blazing their own, and said so. But I did approve of people getting out into the country, and I said so. I have walked and loved walking all my life, and like walking alone or in the company of one other. It was an adventure to most of these people because few of them had ever walked before. Several of them were unemployed young men who wanted not a walk, but fresh air and a bathe.

"I made some good friends, and I met at close quarters a section of the public of whom I knew very little, the lonely clerks and typists and little shopkeepers. I am sure that they profit enormously from these trips, because they get far afield for a sum that is ridiculously cheap, they meet new friends, get taken out of themselves, and do enjoy the exercise. I always expect things to be better than they are, but as has been pointed out to me, these hikers may not stand and gaze at every tree, listen to every bird, or even touch the fringe of the real countryside, but if they were not out on these expeditions they would be reduced to a Sunday walk down the Camberwell or Wandsworth Road. By virtue of their numbers they are now able to penetrate to tiny villages in Kent, walk over the South Downs, along the river banks of Hampshire, over Salisbury Plain, through the New Forest, and even as far west as the Blackmore Vale and south over the water to Treport, Wimereux and Knocke.

"Most of these ramblers are members of the Youth Hostels Association, accustomed to spend not more than a shilling on a night's lodging. They don't mind walking in the rain all day and being treated with scant courtesy by the inn-keepers who overcharge them grossly for a most insipid tea. They are out to have a good time, and

they have a good time whatever happens. I wish I shared their adaptability. These Sunday escapades are their nearest approach to the Heaven of their dreams. The underdog's life is not a happy one. Yet when I went from carriage to carriage urging them to get out of the ruck, strike out for a walk on their own, refuse to accept a sixpenny tea for one shilling and threepence, and so on, I was regarded as an uncomfortable revolutionary.

"*The Writer* for November 1936 surprised me a good deal by congratulating me on this railway free-lancing. Here's the cutting :

" ' Most notable of all is the signal success of S. P. B. Mais, who writes much of the holiday publicity matter of the Southern Railway Company, their booklets of week-end rambles, and in addition describes the holiday attractions of several seaside resorts. . . . This is chiefly because he had first made himself personally known to many of his public by conducting in person some of the rambles organised by the S.R. Mais's work is a brilliant example of how to exploit a good idea to the fullest possible extent, and of the success which awaits the man who applies himself thereto with discernment and industry.' "

" That's all very gratifying. But that means that you were cashing in on your personality, not on your writing."

" Not a bit. The rambles now go on of their own volition under other guides who know the country at least as well as I do, and I now go out on my own to find new rambles which I describe with maps and the Southern Railway sell at sixpence. The first of this series was called *Southern Railway Rambles*. Then I went further afield and wrote *Walking at Week Ends*. The idea of this book was first to incite people to stay in the New Forest, or on the Kent and Sussex coast and then show them two or three unknown walks that they could take from the place where they were staying. This too is having a big vogue, and I am now extending the theme to cover all the main stopping places on the

line covered by the Atlantic Coast Express, acting on the principle : ' There's a jolly bit of country—let's get out here.' I may even call it : *Let's Get Out Here*.

"One day as I was walking along, a young couple emerged from the woods near Ide Hill and asked me the way to Brasted. They held up a book that they were studying. ' We've been following one of this fellow Mais's rambles,' said the man. ' So we're completely lost,' said the girl. ' I imagine that is what he intended,' I said as I set them on their way.

"In spite of leading its readers ' through brake and through briar,' and for the matter of that through barbed wire where no barbed wire ought to be, this book had over 50,000 buyers."

"Nice fat satisfying sales," he said. "These fifty thousand and one hundred thousand copies. You like doing them?"

"I certainly do. It gives me the chance of discovering more country at great profit to myself physically and economically. I put the best of myself into the job, because if I fall down on one of these brochures I shan't be employed again. So far from lowering my stock, it immensely enhances it to have my name attached to huge artistic posters placarded on every station platform in the country. There is far too much nonsense talked about advertising. The B.B.C. always pride themselves on keeping aloof from the taint of advertising and yet they advertise gramophone records every day of the week. They advertise dance bands. They advertise the *Radio Times* and *The Listener*. They advertise Sir John Reith's doughty Calvinism and they advertise my indomitable cheerfulness and irrepressible enthusiasm just as they advertise Stephen King-Hall's and Howard Marshall's capacity to simplify and epitomise the world's news in a low musical voice. *The Times* would be the first to resent the accusation that they advertise in their editorial columns, yet I noticed that one issue of the periodical *Oxford* was given prominence day after day for a whole month before its publication with a list of its contents and contributors.

“ Every time the church bells ring they are advertising the church.

“ Sir John Squire, advertising the virtues of the Fifty Shilling Tailors, wrote: ‘ Somebody once offered me free cigarettes for years if I would say I liked them. I said I was not an advertisement writer.’ That surely shows an astonishing lapse in logic. Of course Sir John Squire is an advertisement writer. He has been advertising Sir John Squire all his life just as James Agate has been advertising James Agate all his life.

“ It is solely a question of degree in taste, blatancy and honesty. It is quite time that those who pride themselves on not having descended to the writing of advertisements realise that there is a confusion in their mind. If they mean that they have never accepted a bribe for saying a thing is good when they don’t think so, that is a very different story. Bribery is quite uncommon among writers. In a very varied career I have only twice been approached by the briber. The writing up of some useful commodity for pay because you like it is a great deal more honest than the decrying of a politician for pay because your newspaper proprietor orders you to do so. Here is a case in point:

“ While I was staying with my father and mother last year they showed me with great pride a revolving summer-house that they had just bought. It was obviously making a great deal of difference to their health to be sitting in the sun whenever the sun was out. I went home and ordered one, and found that it was not only more health-giving for me to work in than my study, but that it provided exactly the right resting-place for Imogen at six months to enjoy the sun in her pram. She was protected from all wind and kept away from the noises of the house. I wrote and told the makers that they weren’t calling attention to the grand qualities of this invention. I suggested a brochure. They were delighted. I liked writing it. They were glad to get it. I charged my usual advertising rates. They were satisfied. I was satisfied. And if the readers of the brochure

are not satisfied that is their look-out, for the brochure is of course distributed free."

"I am inclined to agree," he said, "but it's not a universally held opinion that the advertisers can command the services of well-established writers like yourself."

"I realise that," I said. "When the directors of Swan Pen asked me to write the brochure of Sunderland House they apologised for approaching me. 'We felt,' they said, 'that you would feel insulted by the suggestion.'"

"Indeed," I replied, "I feel honoured to have my name linked with such an unimpeachably excellent commodity." And I was right. When they debated in the House of Keys whether I was a fit and proper person to undertake the writing of the Isle of Man Guide, one member of the House advanced as a reason for my selection the very fact that he had seen my name associated with the Swan pen. Obviously what was good enough for the Swan was good enough for the Manxman."

"Do you do a lot of this holiday publicity?"

"I've done the guides for Brighton, Harrogate, Cheltenham and Southport as winter resorts. Then the hotel managers asked me to do the brochures for their hotels. I've done the G.W. Railway Hotel, the Manor House, Moretonhampstead, Burgh Island Hotel, Fortingall Hotel in Perthshire, and the Langham Hotel Coronation book, as well as the Bien Donn  restaurant that they ran at the Johannesburg Exhibition. Here again I like doing the work, because no expense is spared in getting the brochure up handsomely and paying the best artists to collaborate with me in illustrating."

"There seems to me one rather big snag in all this. Aren't you in some danger of claiming too much for the commodity? Isn't there something a little wrong in being paid always to praise?"

"But I don't always praise. I'm paid to appraise. Nobody ever did himself any good by claiming to be able to do more than he can. That's where so many patent medicines fail. They claim to cure every ill,

and the result is that nobody thinks them capable of curing anything. When I'm paid to write a brochure of an hotel or a resort I write down my impressions."

"Usually good ones."

"My impressions usually are good ones."

"An enthusiast."

"You see how the word chases me round and attaches itself to me. When I see a shortcoming I say so."

"Don't the advertisers jib at that?"

"I've sometimes had a struggle to convince them that the best publicity is to tell the exact truth. To point out a shortcoming in an advertisement is to go a long way to forestall criticism and to secure a remedy."

"You seem to have gone into the technical side pretty thoroughly."

"The psychological surely, not the technical. Moss Bros. ask me to do a brochure which will help to sell hunting kit. I suggest a light history of hunting to be illustrated in colour by Lionel Edwards, with whom all my life I have wanted to collaborate. They agree at once. I don't, from beginning to end, mention Moss Bros. or hunting kit. I just write out of my heart what I know and feel about hunting."

"About which you're an enthusiast."

"Naturally. And the brochure becomes in consequence one of the best things I've ever written."

"You're trying of course to make out that the free-lancing that you do for advertising is your best work because you get a better deal and so give a better deal."

"I'm suggesting that free-lance advertising is a nobler art than most free-lance writers are willing to admit, and that whereas you often have to adapt your point of view and even your language to suit the caprice of an editor, you will find that the advertiser is willing to give you *carte blanche* to put your case in your own way, and even if he is old-fashioned enough to think that hyperbole is the best advertisement, yet he is nearly always ready to admit that too much beating the drum only defeats its own ends. Noise drives people away while insidious quiet music attracts people nearer."

"I think the truth about you is that you have certain things you want desperately to say, and you are willing to use any medium that offers itself in order to get it said."

"That's probably right. I don't really think when I'm writing a description of England whether it is going to be part of my Esso book on Pictorial Britain, part of my book on London for the Langham Hotel, part of a travel talk for the Travel Association to distribute to every wireless station in the United States and British Empire, part of a piece of propaganda lecture for the National Trust or the London Passenger Transport Board, or part of a book for a publisher in the ordinary way. It seems to me all these dovetail into one another. I want people to see Dovedale in order to enjoy what I've enjoyed. They've got to get there by steamer, aeroplane, train, bus, car, bicycle or on their feet. Obviously by attracting them there I am doing the advertisers of shoes, bicycles, buses, ocean liners, airways, railways and so on a service. I am advertising for them. So some of them like me to do special books on their behalf. It all seems to me pretty obvious."

"But you'd still go on writing about these things even if no advertiser ever hired you."

"Of course I should. It's like broadcasting. The rate of pay for talks is low, but if it were unpaid I should still want to go on telling people over the air about the books I liked and the places I love. In fact if I had the means, and it were possible, I would rather buy the time on the air than keep silence."

"So you really are at heart a preacher. The novelist has given way to the propagandist as I warned you it would."

"You?"

"Yes, I prophesied that when I wrote the notice of one of your early novels for *Punch*. You're not an advertiser. You're a missionary."

"Most missionaries starve or get eaten by lions."

"You won't. You've got the good sense to live on the lions."

Chapter XI

BOOKS

“**Y**OU'RE sure I'm not interrupting you, Mr. Mais ? ”

She peeped shyly inside the door, could see, unless she was stone blind, three desks piled high with books, sheets of notes, books in the process of being manufactured, me, with my pen poised, my brows knit, ignored the implication and came on. After all she had a story to get. Her eyes roamed over the book-lined walls.

“ What an enormous lot of books you have, Mr. Mais.” She seemed surprised.

I refrained from reminding her that if she was in an aquarium she might expect a fair number of fish. She was gazing rapt at the books in one corner, the nearest as you come in.

“ Are these *all* yours ? ” I nodded.

“ All mine.” Her eyes began to roam. I fetched them back. “ No, not those. Shakespeare wrote those.”

“ But I'd no idea you had written *all* those.” There was a note of wonder in her voice.

“ You'll see that some of them are duplicates.”

“ Oh ! ” She made it sound as if I'd cheated somewhere, and after a pause : “ Why ? ”

I found that difficult.

“ Oh ! Charities, bazaars, people who want signed copies for hospitals, and then some of them are not easy to get. I've had to pay more than I care to think to get copies of some of my early works.”

A thought struck me. I must have chuckled out loud.

“ Why laugh ? ” she said, surprised.

“ Only a memory.”

“ Tell me.”

“ It's not important.”

“ I'd like to hear.”

"You've asked for it, remember. The telephone-bell rang a couple of days ago about this time and the London Exchange asked me if I would pay for the call as the man in the box hadn't any money on him. It was a new one on me. I didn't know that the Post Office allowed or encouraged that practice, so I took a chance.

" 'My name's Wilkinson,' came from the other end. 'I've got copies of all your books.'

" 'I don't believe it,' I said.

" He took no notice of that, but went on :

" 'Do you want them?'

" 'How much?' I said.

" 'Oh! I wasn't thinking of charging anything for them,' he replied.

" 'Of course not,' I said. 'Silly of me.'

" 'You see, I'm taking up psychology, and they won't be of any more use to me.'

" 'A silly story, isn't it?'

" 'Did you get them?' asked the girl.

" He told me where he was leaving them for me and then I forgot the address."

" Do you really care so little for your own work? I think it must be wonderful to write books."

This was a new angle from an interviewer. I looked at the girl more closely.

" Where do you come from? " I asked.

" New Zealand," she said. " We think the world of you out there."

" Do you know how many books were published in England alone last year? " I asked.

She shook her head.

" At a conservative estimate let's put it at twenty thousand. No wonder Oxford has to appeal for a new Bodleian. You realise, don't you, that not one in ten books ever finds a publisher. That's not conservative. That's a most liberal estimate. That makes two hundred thousand people with books actually completed last year in this tiny little island. Do you still think it wonderful to write books? It seems much more wonderful to me not to write books."

"But you must be very clever to write a book."

"I agree. There are more than two hundred thousand clever people about. Cleverness is in widest commonalty spread. I wish there was as much happiness. I'm not sure that cleverness gets us anywhere."

"But you know what I mean, Mr. Mais."

"You mean that it requires a good deal of energy to begin a book and concentration to keep it up. That's true. It's a sweat."

"If you despise it so, why do you write?"

"I don't despise it, and I write for the same two reasons that everybody else writes, because I can't help it, and for money. No man but a blockhead, said Doctor Johnson, ever wrote except for money."

"You write because you must. What do you mean by that?"

"I find myself enjoying a peculiarly happy experience, looking on an unknown part of England for the first time, and I feel an irresistible desire to share my happiness with the greatest possible number of people, so I jot down in my little black note-book what I see and what I feel, and there it remains until the occasion comes for me to transfer the scene and the emotion into a book."

"You're a happy sort of person, aren't you? I can tell that from your books."

"People keep on telling me that. I've got 'Prossy's complaint.'"

"Prossy's complaint?"

"Well—not quite. She was hopelessly in love with the booming parson, and I'm hopelessly in love with life. The trouble is that it's so difficult to communicate just what the suddenly warming sun, the garden flowers, scent of lilac, and song of thrush does to me."

"You sound more like a poet."

"That's what I should like to have been, to lisp in numbers as the numbers came. I lack the sense of music and rhythm. I have to say it as I see it. It doesn't change in the crucible of my mind into pure gold as I could wish."

"That may be because you're in too much of a hurry."

"Springing from emotion recollected in tranquillity? You're probably right. I lack Wordsworth's poise. I'm always chasing some new thing like a puppy."

"And so you only get a puppy's enjoyment."

I looked at her afresh.

"What a very discerning young woman you are," I said. She blushed easily.

"Tell me," she said. "How exactly do you set about writing your books?"

"Thank you for the rebuke. For the moment I had forgotten that I was being interviewed. You were almost human. 'How do I set about writing my books?' That's not too easy to answer. I always walk about with a book to read in one pocket—a black leather-bound loose-leaf pocket-book in another. What I'm reading, a conversation overheard in a train, a theme from the thin air streams into my consciousness. I write it down and usually I promptly forget it. You remember how Arnold Bennett got his inspiration for *The Old Wives' Tale*?"

"No. Tell me."

"He saw a fat, ugly, grotesque-looking woman come into a restaurant and sit down. She was so fussy and so awkward that everyone laughed at her, and it came into Bennett's mind that a novelist ought to be able to make a heartrending book out of the history of such a woman, for as he said: 'There is an extreme pathos in the mere fact that every stout, ageing woman was once a young girl with the unique charm of youth in her form and movements and in her mind. And the fact that the change from the young girl to the stout, ageing woman is made up of an infinite number of infinitesimal changes, each unperceived by her, only intensifies the pathos.'"

"Yes—that's all right for a purely objective novel, but aren't nearly all your novels strongly autobiographical?"

"Joseph Conrad said that all true novels are spiritual autobiographies," I replied.

"Yes, but your heroes are always schoolmasters, journalists, things that you yourself have been."

"One can only write of what one knows."

"Surely imagination is there to help the novelist to

project himself into the personalities of people who have no kind of similarity of experience to his own. Think of Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*. According to your thesis no man would have more than one novel in him. Everybody would just write his own *David Copperfield* and stop. I think it is true that everybody has one good novel in him, but you've got to remember that we slough our characters as snakes slough their skins with the regularity if not the frequency of a Buchan cold spell."

"I don't believe that. I believe that the child is the father of the man, and that our characters are all of a piece and that they change very little from the cradle to the grave."

"So outside events have no power over us."

"Not much."

"Not meeting suddenly somebody with whom one falls in love?"

She shook her head violently like a terrier coming out of a cold stream.

"That least of all. You quoted Johnson a minute or two ago. It's my turn. 'Love has no great influence on the sum of life.' Johnson loved his wife, but it doesn't seem to me that she caused any kind of difference to the sum of his life so far as his character was concerned."

"You are indeed a very refreshing young woman. I should not have been surprised to hear a man say that. Robert Louis Stevenson thought that it didn't matter who one married, and Byron said that love was of man's life a thing apart, but he also said that it was woman's whole existence."

"We were discussing the novelist's art, not the difference between the sexes."

"I know, but you were saying that I was autobiographical in my novels, and I was not disagreeing. All I said was that man's nature changes in course of time, and so he writes a sort of *Pilgrim's Progress* in many parts. It's his own pilgrimage all the time, but experiences, including that of love, transmute if not him at any rate his ideas. He becomes mellow or less mellow."

"But the same hero."

"You are as tenacious as an octopus. Have a glass of sherry."

"Thanks. I will. How like a man to turn off an argument with the offer of a drink."

"It's polite anyway. What else do you want to know?"

"I've not started yet. You make notes and forget them. What then?"

"The urge becomes too strong."

"Or the need for money?"

"A judicious mixture of both, probably. The beginning's like the beginning of falling in love. There never was anything so good as this in the world before. The first, fine careless rapture, the early ecstasy, is one of life's loveliest gifts."

"In which?"

"In both. The first chapter writes itself. I feel that Nature has put the pen into my hand, writes through me, that I am the chosen vessel of God through whom He elects to interpret His most wonderful visions."

"You make yourself sound like Blake. So you really do feel yourself inspired?"

It was my turn to blush.

"You remember what Ben Jonson said: 'Ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing.' Inspiration is not always accompanied by a rush of words. Indeed I have heard it said that to be brief is in some sort to be inspired, which I choose to translate as the fact that the tap of inspiration is turned on capriciously and for very short periods. It is a sort of lightning. One moves forward slowly through the darkness, murkily, and then at very rare intervals comes the lightning flash and one's way is quite clear, brilliantly clear, for a few yards, at most, and after the flash one moves more slowly than ever. The darkness is intensified by the contrast. But it's no good waiting for the flash. It will come ten times in as many hours and then not once in ten years."

"Meanwhile your publishers and the public are clamouring for more books."

"You mean the baker, butcher and grocer are clamouring to be paid."

"They couldn't have been in your case, because you weren't financially dependent on your books. You always held other jobs and wrote in your spare time."

"Yes. That's true. I never had the chance so to order my life that when I've had a book to write I could concentrate solely on that. I often wonder how Trollope managed to keep up so high a level by working to a stop watch of two hundred and fifty words every quarter of an hour. I always like these stories of Gilbert Frankau allowing no one to telephone to him before luncheon, of Ian Hay writing for a straight four hours every day, of James Laver writing for four hours before breakfast. I cannot recollect having had four consecutive hours at my disposal to write in since I started to write, except in a train. Indeed I have done most of my writing in trains. As soon as I have got well under way with my subject I carry the writing tablet about with me wherever I go in the hope that I shall get a few spare minutes to add a sentence or two."

"You don't type your books straight off?"

"I don't type at all. It would entirely stop the flow of my thoughts. The mere fact of writing the words down with pen and ink acts as the right speed-gauge for my brain. I take down countless odd notes on the backs of letters as well as in my note-book, but I very seldom look at them. I just write straight ahead without any real idea of the denouement of my story. The characters take the reins into their own hands, and do things and say things that I never intended."

"This must lead to a lot of confusion of thought."

"It has led me more than once into a confusion of dress. I've sent out a heroine for a walk in a white frock and made her come home in a green gown."

"That has happened in real life. And after all you must give the critics something to criticise."

"I give myself plenty to criticise before I've done. After an electrifying start I find myself wandering about in a very Slough of Despond about page one hundred

and thirty one, always a fatal page to me. It was the number over my bed at school."

"You're superstitious?"

"No, I shouldn't say so. I like touching lamp-posts like Doctor Johnson, and washing nine times like Naaman, and bowing to the new moon, and throwing silver for the pixies into the stone circles and—— No! I shouldn't call myself superstitious."

"Well, you're superstitious enough. You were saying, about page one hundred and thirty-one?"

"I was saying 'He tires betimes who spurts too fast betimes.'"

"You write too fast?"

"To begin with, yes. Then I get a most strange disease that I simply cannot cure myself of. I am afraid that I shall die before my immortal work is finished, so I plough my way on, just filling up pages to make it seem bulky, so that if I die untimely there will be enough written to make a book."

"A sort of *Weir of Hermiston*?"

"That sort of thing, yes."

"And then you don't die, and then, what?"

"Then I've said all I want to say. I've written myself empty. I'm tired to death of my characters. The whole thing seems turgid and unnecessary."

"And you tear it all up and start again."

"No, that's just what I don't do. I believe that the burning of Carlyle's *French Revolution* meant a much better book, and the fact that T. E. Lawrence left the manuscript of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* on the platform of Didcot station meant an infinitely better final version. I believe that if I had the means, the patience and the time to burn every first draft of every book I've written I should have written a number of novels of which nobody need have been ashamed."

"Why are you so sure of this?"

"Because of the success of my books made from broadcast talks. There you see has been paring down, strict revision, tearing up, worrying over isolated phrases to get the exact picture, all done to fit the

story into the framework of a fifteen or twenty-minute talk. I know now from a good deal of experience that you can't over-polish, over-revise. Burn, and burn and burn again is my motto."

"This sounds like the forging of fine steel."

"It is an exact analogy."

"And when it is finally revised and really complete, what then?"

"There succeeds to the sense of despondency aroused between the first impulse and the final achievement a sense of appalling emptiness. When I clear up my desk of all the bits of paper and notes and take off the parcel to be posted to the typewriting agency I get a sense as if my house were emptied of all the people that I hold most dear. I am terribly afraid that the manuscript is going to get lost in the post. That there's going to be an accident. I want to ride as far away as I can and not come back for months. It is quite literally true that one does write oneself empty. I feel like an empty cistern. In point of fact there is always so much other work that has been put aside now waiting to be done that it is just a question of sitting at another desk and burying myself in a new mass of unfinished material, another book, a trayful of letters, an article, a speech to prepare, a book to review, an examination paper to set."

"Meanwhile your manuscript is at the typist's. It comes back. What then?"

"It looks quite a different book. I like it in type for the first seven or eight minutes, then I pounce upon a glaring misprint, then I start to read it, then I search for a pencil to delete whole pages of the most unreadable parts. This revision takes two or three days, and then I send the mutilated script to the publisher. There follows a dreadful interval of suspense. Then one of two things happens. He either sends it back asking for certain alterations or he makes no comment at all and sends it to the printers. And when I have mercifully forgotten all about it and become thoroughly immersed in other work back it all comes in galley and I start to read it once more."

"Do you like it in galley?"

"Never. It must be the length of the sheets. It always seems to me completely unreadable, and the paragraphs always too long and heavy or too sketchy. I'm never certain whether I like Roman numerals or English. I'm never quite sure about the type. No, the galley period is uncomfortable. I don't care about the book. I've lost interest. Curiously enough when the page-proofs come in I begin to get perfervid again. I begin to make a thousand corrections that I failed to see in galley, and this costs me between twenty and thirty pounds in extra corrections. In my enthusiasm I think it a matter of life and death to get every comma right, every phrase taut."

"Very commendable."

"Very expensive. Then come the sample dust-jackets, and sample covers, and sample title-pages. I like all these always. Then after an extraordinary interval comes the day when a parcel of the author's six free copies arrives. That is a great moment, and if I lived to write a hundred books it would still be a great moment, and I should still open the parcel with great deliberation, never cutting the string, folding up the paper carefully, and then peeping gingerly in and taking out copy number one most reverently. What a lovely, fat, sweet-smelling book. Is there anything comparable to the first smell of one's own book? People are always comparing the writing of a book with the bearing of a child. It is different in every single particular but one. A baby smells sweet, and so does a new book.

I wish books read as sweetly as they smell. I turn over the pages. There are plenty of them. I still, you see, hang on to the silly fantasy that my book must be good because it is bulky. I take it downstairs. I stand it up in front of my desk where I am to work that morning. I take it up at frequent intervals during the morning and open it and smell it, and turn it over and touch it. After luncheon I put it in those shelves, and probably take it down to stroke and smell it three times in the next three days, and then relegate it to the limbo of deservedly forgotten things."

"But what about the Press notices? Don't you read those?"

I pointed to a green steel cabinet.

"That," I said, "is full of Press notices. Goodness knows how many pounds a year I pay to read what the critics say of me in the hope that I shall learn from their criticisms how to do better next time."

"And do you?"

"I seldom do more than give them one glance. A likes it. Good. B doesn't. Who cares? I then file them away."

"And so that's how books are written. I'd like to see some of those notices."

"Pick 'em out where you like. You've plenty of choice. And if you come to something comic or good let's hear it. I always like encouragement and a good laugh."

For some time there was silence except for the rustling of bits of paper and a few low laughs. I forgot all about her. After all I had work to do. Then I heard a voice say from the bureau at the far end of the room:

"You must have been a much better novelist than you gave me cause to believe. Your modesty is misleading."

I looked up.

"Listen to this," she said. "You've probably forgotten what they said about *April's Lonely Soldier*."

"I certainly have," I said. "It was my first venture into fiction."

"'Youth,' she read, 'is written all over this book; and what better can one say of it? Romance is wedded with pedagogy. Very new indeed is this.' That's the *Manchester Guardian*." She picked up another cutting. "'These letters awaken keenness: they rouse energy: they blow away the dumps and the indifference that hang over the beauty and the possibilities of human life on the earth.' That's *The Times Literary Supplement*." And listen to what Gerald Gould said in *The New Statesman*, 'The charm of the book has destroyed my critical faculty. . . . I am grateful that anybody should be so

keen, so courageous, so preposterous, so young As for April herself she is easily the most adorable girl in recent fiction.' And here's the *Daily Telegraph*: 'This witty and sparkling book.' You must have been bucked. Oh! listen to *Punch* on *Interlude*." She went on reading:

"Mr. Mais has given us a piece of character-drawing almost flawlessly perfect. Not for a very long time has it been my good fortune to attend such a triumph, and I wish to proclaim it. . . . I feel sure that he has within him the qualities that go to make a great novelist and that his future lies straight and clear before him.' That ought to have set your heart glowing."

"It did something more useful than that," I said. "It inspired the great Grant Richards, who at that time had gathered round him all the most promising writers of the time, to send me a telegram asking me to go and see him, and when a young Public School-master gets a telegram from a publisher of the stamp of Grant Richards his heart is not so much set glowing as beating furiously. By the way not all the reviewers felt as the *Punch* man did. I said in a preface that my idea was to show how a man of Shelley's sensibility might have behaved in 1917, whereupon the *Bystander* reviewer suggested that in my next novel I should set out to show what a man of Chesterton's calibre would have made of his life in 1817."

The girl wasn't listening. She was picking her way through more files.

"I see that *Punch* liked your next novel *Rebellion* even more than *Interlude*. They call it 'a more thoughtful and promising book.' "

"*Punch* was always good to me in the early days," I said. "Though it warned me after the appearance of *Lovers of Silver* that I should soon have to make up my mind whether I meant to be a novelist or a propagandist. But the review I remember best of any of my novels was the shortest and came from Rebecca West in the *New Statesman*. She merely said of *Quest Sinister*, 'How long, O Lord, how long.' "

"Women reviewers are always snooty," said the girl.

"Not at all. I remember Rebecca West herself wrote to me about this very novel."

I got up from my seat and went to my filing cabinet.

"I've kept one or two letters that gave me special interest. I'll read you one or two as a rest from those Press cuttings."

I took out the Rebecca West letter.

"You certainly have got a good filing system," said the girl.

"I've got a passion for gadgets," I said. "But I like to know where things are. I've got no memory. Listen :

" "I didn't think *Quest Sinister* was vulgar, but I thought (if you want me to be frank) that it read as if you were very ill. It struck me as one of the most overstrained books I'd ever read. Can't you Coué yourself quieter? . . . I don't mean really Coué: just one's own will exerted in the ordinary way. Forgive this auntly solicitude. I refrain from saying anything about flannels next the skin, anyway.

" "Yours sincerely,

" "REBECCA WEST." "

I picked up another. "Here's one from Hugh Walpole about *Orange Street*.

" "I have been greatly interested in all of it and in Brian I think you've done something very fine. He doesn't seem to me at all exaggerated. In fact I knew a man once who was so like him that I wonder whether you knew him. Rose too I thought admirable.

" "Yours very sincerely,

" "HUGH WALPOLE."

"Here's one from H. G. Wells, on the publication of *Eclipse* :

" " *Eclipse* is quite a first rate novel—The people wonderfully alive and true to type. It excited me and interested me and moved me. If it has a fault it is that

it is a little too easily done. No bloody sweat in the writing. But I am not sure if that is a fault in a story about this sort of people, or the angle you have taken.

“ ‘Yours H. G.’ ”

“ Here are some you can read for yourself.” I handed her a batch. “ That one’s from Mr. William R. Weber, Box 35109, California State Prison, asking for a copy of *Orange Street*. I wonder if he wrote to every living novelist and what his harvest was. Here’s one from Mr. Louis N. Ferpel of Brooklyn giving a list of five hundred misprints in *Orange Street*. *Orange Street* seems to have set America talking. Try this one. It’s signed ‘ Gabrielle ’ and was written at five o’clock in the morning of the eighth of June, 1925, and begins : ‘ I have just finished reading your *Caged Birds* and because the story of Jocelyn and Denys is the parallel of Michael’s and mine, I am writing to you.’ So you see my novels have kept girls up all night before this.

“ And once I remember coming down by the night train from Scotland. The only other passenger in the compartment was a young girl going up to Cambridge. She began talking about books and volunteered the information that of all modern novelists she disliked most ‘ that fellow Mais.’ She then kept me up all the night going into detail about the faults in character-drawing, situation and theme of all my novels. When she was getting out I handed her my card. ‘ There’s just one thing,’ I said to her, ‘ about this abject fellow Mais, but he at any rate will always be able to claim that, hate him and despise him as you may, you have spent the whole of one night alone with him quite voluntarily, which is more than you have done or are ever likely to do with any novelist whom you admire or love.’ ”

“ And while we are on the subject of women I’d have you know that Rose Macaulay, who has said a bitter thing or two in her day, described *Caged Birds* as ‘ a very naif and human book.’ ”

“ Yes, yes,” interrupted the girl, “ but you aren’t only a novelist. What about your other books ? ”

"I'm not even mainly a novelist. But novelist is the title they expect on passports, dog-licences, birth-certificates, and things of that sort. So I put novelist first. In point of fact I began by editing a School Shakespeare, a very right and proper entry into authorship for a schoolmaster. Indeed the popular text-book is far more profitable than the popular novel. I've sold over twenty thousand copies of my *English Course for Schools* and *English Course for Everybody*. The critics simply tumbled over each other in their hurry to give me their blessing. The *Spectator* said of my Shakespeare that 'for use in form by a teacher with ideas of his own they could hardly be bettered.' The *Teachers' Times* described the English Course as 'a very refreshing book on English, suggestive, stimulating, original and comprehensive.' I wrote the *English Course for Schools* when I was Examiner for the Matriculation to enable candidates to see what I meant by English and I wrote the *English Course for Everybody* for my Cadets at the R.A.F. College, Cranwell." I got up from my desk again.

"You're wasting your time going through all those Press cuttings. The easiest way to find out what the critics said about these books is to look on the dust-jackets." I went over to my shelves. "Listen to the *Aberdeen Journal* on the *English Course for Schools*: 'There is not a dull page in this book, not a dull sentence in his pages.' That's the sort of thing I like to hear about myself."

"And what about your other books? They aren't all educational or fiction."

"There were volumes of literary essays. One was happily called *From Shakespeare to O. Henry*. The title was Grant Richards' idea. *The Times* headed its column review 'An Enthusiast.' I became known as 'the lively and stimulating appreciator of books.' I wrote *A Schoolmaster's Diary* giving vent to all my feelings about educational reform, and the *Manchester Guardian* said: 'It would not be surprising to hear that many of the best boys were on his side and that he had helped to make them the best,' which made very pleasant reading for me,

and my old friend *Punch* said : ‘ You may be violently angry with him, but he has got to be reckoned with. . . .’ The *Manchester Guardian* had already told the world after the appearance of *A Public School in War-Time* that ‘ nothing can prevent his doing some good in the world.’ It surprised me by finding that the book was full of wisdom and poetry, and even found that ‘ one must feel very friendly towards Mr. Mais ’ in my literary essays.

“ Then I began my crusade into the countryside. Now I had all the critics well on my side. ‘ You can almost smell the heather and hear the brook,’ said the *Daily Telegraph* about *The High Lands of Britain*. The *Sunday Times* talked of my ‘ invigorating vitality ’ in *See England First*. And so it went on. I hit a very rich vein when I started writing about England, and I reached my climax when I published the broadcast talks I had given under the title of *This Unknown Island*. It was because of those talks that I became known as ‘ the Ambassador of the Countryside.’ ”

The girl closed the file.

“ Thank you for saving me the trouble of reading the Press cuttings. You seem to have had consistently kind notices.”

“ I’ve written mainly on subjects that people like, books and the countryside. They claim that I have made them happier, though there is just one point of interest about this. I started writing seriously in 1917. It wasn’t until 1927 that people began to write to me in large numbers saying how much their pleasure had been intensified by my revelations to them of their own countryside, and the reason was of course that a hundred people listen-in for every one that reads a book. It was my broadcasting that first made my name familiar to the great bulk of the public, and in fairness I ought not to describe myself as a novelist, but as a broadcaster. I was only saying over the air what I had been saying on paper for years.”

“ Yes, but there’s a personal note about a voice that is lacking in cold print. That’s why print is cold. And,” she continued, “ your voice has a very warm, welcoming, friendly note about it.”

"That's pleasant to hear," I said. "I'm always glad to think that none of my books has so far driven anybody to commit suicide, though in 1933 a young man was arrested with three books that he had stolen from the Times Book Club. One was by Hugh Walpole, the second by Francis Brett Young, and the third was *This Unknown Island*. The judge said: 'He has either a pretty taste in literature or he knows the books that will sell well.'"

I was still digging among my letters.

"Here's one from William Sandager, an American, about the book of the broadcast tour that I made in that country under the title of *A Modern Columbus*; 'I didn't know that any Englishman could write a book like that.' And here's one from a private soldier, 6838518, Rifleman C. Milgate, 1st/60th Rifles in Lucknow: 'To-day's mail brought the most wonderful book I ever read—*See England First*.'"

"Still I expect your broadcast letters are ever so much more exciting."

"Exciting? Yes. Somebody left a huge live rat in a basket outside my door for me to open when I came home at midnight after broadcasting on *Living Dangerously*. But interesting. Have a look at these."

I handed over a letter from Marjorie Johnson of Nottingham enclosing notes of faery music that she had heard in the woods of Sheringham after reading of the faery music that I had heard in the Outer Hebrides. The others bore the Royal coat of arms stamped in scarlet. They were the Queen's and the Duke of Windsor's gracious acceptances of copies of the book *S.O.S.* compiled from my broadcast talks on unemployment.

The rewards of writing are unexpected but wholly delightful. That grin of delight which according to William Morris comes over the real artist at a close approximation to, if not an exact achievement of his ideal may never come my way, but I treasure the letters of those who say that my books have helped them, and I still clutch to myself the hope that the *Manchester Guardian* was not altogether wrong when it said that "nothing can prevent his doing some good in the world."

Chapter XII

LECTURING

“DO you like lecturing, Mr. Mais?”

“Lecturing, Madam, would be wholly delightful if it were not for the physical fatigue engendered in getting to and from the lecture hall, the mental fatigue of having to keep up light conversation at dinner before and coffee afterwards, the excessive heat or excessive cold of the room, the excessive wordiness of the chairman and the quite remarkable lack of intelligence among the male and even more remarkable lack of good looks among the female members of the audience who might be neatly divided between the ‘good old’ and the ‘poor old,’ never the good-looking young. But I like lecturing, Mrs. Hicklethwaite.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Indeed? Why?”

“I like talking so long as I am not talking to one person.”

“You mean you like an audience?”

“The larger the better. I like fighting an audience. I like trying to rouse an audience. I like informing people. I like trying to stir the young to take an interest in books and the beauty of the countryside.”

Her eyes flashed.

“I thought you said that your audiences were never young.”

“Indeed, no! I said the ‘good-looking young.’ Or do you consider the average schoolgirl good-looking?”

Mrs. Hicklethwaite looked at the clock.

“I’m sorry to have to hurry you, but my husband always likes us to be there at five minutes to.”

I rose, leaving the coffee untasted. It had been a hurried meal in a room without a fire at a table of cold

viands and only non-intoxicating liquor. I was feeling uncharitable. My host was very wealthy. The conversation at "supper" was confined almost entirely to my host's expressions of disapproval of men and women bathing together.

I agreed with Mrs. Hicklethwaite.

"An admirable trait. I wish all husbands would compel their wives to arrive five minutes before rather than twenty minutes after the start of my discourse. Noise disturbs the trend of my thought, and the attention of most audiences. Though I was in a fire once. I must tell you."

She looked back at me smiling acidly.

"There *may* be opportunity afterwards, if you keep within the limits of your time."

The opportunity never presented itself. I was whisked off to another house by a complete stranger after the lecture. I was glad. It was unlikely to be as cold. It was not. There was a good coal fire burning. There was whisky. There were sandwiches. There were plenty of amusing people about.

A radiant young thing approached me. She gave me the impression that she would wholly approve of mixed bathing. I never found out.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Mais. I thought your lecture was just grand. Such a change from these fusty old dodderers who hum and haw and talk over our heads, and forget their slides and have to keep on referring to their notes. But how do you manage to keep up for a whole hour without faltering and without any notes at all? Don't you ever feel nervous? Were we a good audience? Help yourself to whisky. You must be awfully tired. Even if you are used to it, it must be an awful strain."

What a sympathetic, understanding, delightful creature. And as easy to talk to as to look at. I looked for some quiet corner where I might lay bare my heart to her. She wafted me to a sofa. I sat down with a contented sigh and a glass half full of neat whisky.

"It's just about as tiring as a fierce game of Rugger."

"Oh! You're a Rugger player. I adore Rugger. You played for England?"

By the time I had finished telling her some of my more brilliant exploits for Blackheath (it seemed unnecessary to emphasise that it was the "B" Fifteen) I felt as if I had been an International Cap for several seasons. The older I grow the more easily I find that I confer on myself various once-coveted distinctions. And really these modern internationals, Owen Smith and the rest, look terribly young and even rather frail compared with the Gamlens and Basil MacLears of my time. Not unskilfully my audience of one brought the subject back to lecturing.

"You like lecturing, Mr. Mais. I can see that by the fire and enthusiasm you put into it. I adore enthusiasm. It must be lovely to sway vast audiences."

"Horatio Bottomley did," I said. "And Hitler and Mussolini and Father Coughlin and Huey Long and Canon Elliot and Leslie Weatherhead and Sankey and Moody. It's rather a dangerous gift, rhetoric."

"But in the hands of the right people what a power for good."

"I'm not sure that the passion to preach is the highest of human virtues. I often think it is a most insidious form of self-indulgence."

"Well, if it's a form of self-indulgence it is surely the least harmful form."

"Yes. People needn't listen."

"I didn't mean that."

"Long uninterrupted discourses puff a man up, make him sententious and self-important. I don't think lecturers are remarkable for humour. There's no more special virtue in being able to speak than there is in being able to write, nothing to give oneself airs about. Almost anybody can speak. It is merely a question of self-assurance, marshalling a few facts, and watching how your points go down."

She was an ideal listener. She almost nestled into me.

"This is most awfully interesting. I'd love to be a lecturer. Tell me some more. Have some more whisky

first. I'll put the decanter just here and you can help yourself."

A most sensible girl. I settled down to a thoroughly happy evening.

"What exactly do you want to know?"

"You're sure you're not too tired? Let me get you another cushion. A cigar? How stupid of me. Now we shan't be interrupted. I told Mummy that you hated talking after lecturing, and didn't play bridge, so they're happy and we're happy. Now, let me think. What do I want to know? I'm rather stupid I'm afraid, I shall just have to ask the questions as they come into my head. Oh, yes! Here's something I wanted to ask you. I kept on feeling that you were looking at me and talking to me only during the lecture. I suppose it was all imagination, but how wonderful if you make every member of the audience feel that you are talking to her (or him) alone."

"But I *was* talking to you. I did pick you out."

"But how extraordinary. You didn't know me. You weren't to know that we were going to meet afterwards. You're only saying that to please me."

"I picked you out as the member of the audience most likely to be sympathetic. It puts me right off my stride to catch the eye of the ugly or the stupid or the unsympathetic."

"But *when* did you pick me out?"

"During the chairman's opening remarks I always scan every face in the hall to get some idea of the general mentality, and to see whether they have come for social reasons, for uplift, to go to sleep, or because their home life is so unhappy. Nobody would go to a lecture for entertainment."

"I do."

"Nonsense. You go to please your father and mother, and to be able to play hostess to the lecturers afterwards."

"Indeed I don't, I hate the silly old fatheads. Only you're different somehow."

"I told you you were sympathetic. Talking to an

audience entirely composed of you would be easy and wholly enjoyable."

She chuckled.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself to-night, but it is wicked of you to drop your voice into your boots for those quick asides. I hated missing them. I know they were the best part of your lecture."

I bridled instantly.

"Don't tell me I was inaudible. I pride myself on having a voice that can be heard clearly in the very worst hall."

"Your voice is marvellously clear. I never heard anyone who was easier to listen to, even great Aunt Martha didn't bother to use her ear-trumpet."

"I saw her," I said. "She was asleep."

"It takes a very melodious voice to send her to sleep."

"It didn't send you to sleep."

"I was far too busy listening to what you had to say."

"Tell me my other faults."

"You haven't any. You're bound to speak fast, I expect because you get so worked up, and you drop your voice at the ends of sentences sometimes which makes one lose a key-word occasionally."

"You're certainly taking the stuffing out of me."

"But these aren't faults. You were glorious."

"Keep on saying so. No man ever died of too much flattery."

"I suppose your audiences vary a lot. Which do you find the most responsive?"

"Girls' schools everywhere, and the North much more than the South."

"I can understand the schools. Lectures are treats to them, anyway. But why the North?"

"There's a much deeper desire to know about things in the North. They go to lectures for their own sake. In the South nearly all lectures are a sop to the godly. The lecture societies are nearly always tied up with a church, and the church is more often than not a Northern church, a Presbyterian church. Or if not that it is a Congregational church. More often than not I seem to

occupy a pulpit. We start with a prayer or hymn, or both. It has a bad effect on me. I find myself always on the verge of preaching."

"It certainly must cramp your style."

"The strange thing is that the more religious the body the lighter they want the discourse. I can't get used to rousing laughter from the pulpit."

"That's probably because you were brought up in the Established Church."

"Which doesn't encourage lectures."

"Why do you like North-country audiences better than South-country audiences?"

"They're more attentive. They don't waste time on introductory remarks by chairmen, or votes of thanks at the end. On the other hand they are less easy to rouse to applause. They seem to think it undignified in some Northern towns to express approval even when they feel it. Usually in the North I find that I'm expected to lecture in a theatre. The curtain goes up at exactly seven-thirty, and I have to walk on to the middle of a huge bare ugly empty stage with a howling draught piercing my backless dinner waistcoat and dress shirt."

"You ought to wear Chil-Prufe."

"I do. It penetrates that too. I get no chance to pick out the sympathetic face even if there is one. I see just a sea of faces looking very severe. It takes a bit of time pitching my voice to the right key. After broadcasting I get so accustomed to speaking softly that I forget to speak up until I am shouted at. And that's disconcerting. And then there are always people getting up from the very middle of the hall who have to catch the last bus to somewhere and I'm always sure that they're going because they can't bear it a moment longer, and then everything goes black in front of my eyes and I lose altogether the thread of my discourse. I think I am going to faint. I wonder if this is death. I stop and forget all the words as if I were an actor who had suddenly dried up. To me it is an age till words come back. But the audience don't seem to notice anything wrong. After all, most barristers and nearly all bishops

and dons speak so slowly and deliberately that one begins by wondering if they are ever going on, and one ends by not caring if they don't."

"I should notice it at once if you paused. Words tumble from your mouth like a cascade."

"A spate of words isn't necessarily of any more value than a spate of water. I wish I could cultivate the slow deliberation of the lawyers and politicians."

"Slow speech isn't necessarily a sign of great wisdom."

"It gives the appearance of it."

"You don't give the impression of caring much about appearances. That probably annoys some of your audiences. I expect some of them do get up and go out to express disapproval of your views. Do they applaud much when the curtain falls in the North?"

"I am never quite prepared for applause. Schoolgirls frequently cheer. The applause of grown-ups is usually perfunctory."

"Have you any gauge of the success of your lectures? Do you feel satisfied with yourself one day and dissatisfied with yourself another?"

"I nearly always feel terribly depressed because I have forgotten at least twenty per cent of the points I prepared."

"Then why don't you refer to notes?"

"I'm afraid of losing the attention of the audience. If I ever have to quote from a book the tension is relaxed. Reference to notes diverts an audience's attention altogether."

"That seems to demand too great a taxation on your memory."

"You've got to give value for money."

"Then I hope your fees are high."

"They vary. I used to give a lot of lectures free. It was a mistaken policy. People don't value what they don't pay for. Wherever I have met with lack of courtesy and indifference among the audience it has always been because I have agreed to talk for no fee or what they call a 'nominal honorarium!'"

The girl laughed.

"The longer the word the smaller the cheque."

"Precisely. A fee may be fat, an honorarium is always thin. The more I am paid the fuller the hall and the fuller the hall the happier I am."

"Doesn't a big audience unnerve you?"

"A small one terrifies me much more and takes much more out of me. An audience of two thousand warms me by their very presence. An audience of twenty chills me. The empty seats seem to deride the poor boobs for being such fools as to leave their cosy firesides on such a night to hear me, and they also twit me with being a fool to go to such discomforts of travel and cold to talk to a mere handful."

"If your theory is that you go down well in direct proportion to the fee paid, your best audience ought to be the richest."

I shook my head.

"The intelligent poor are the best audience. The rich come in late and have seldom time to give me more than half their attention. They don't part from their money at all willingly for lectures. In Cheltenham I addressed a crowded hall of very much befurred ladies of fashion, and before I began the chairman had to warn them that the society would have to dissolve as none of the members would pay their half-crown annual membership subscription. It was during question time after this talk that a peculiarly plain middle-aged woman got up and said that it was no good my advocating solitary walking for women, because whenever she had been for a walk by herself a strange man had attempted to molest her. She gave the impression that every male who saw her had tried to rob her of her virginity. One look at her was enough to convince me that she would have been safe if she were the only girl in the world."

"That's the compensation of being ugly. You always think yourself the object of all men's desire."

"Well, you won't ever have to worry about that, anyway," I said rather aptly, as I thought.

She roared with laughter.

"I like you even more than I thought I was going to."

Tell me some of the other good things that people have said to you in question time. I suppose you're simply swamped with autograph hunters wherever you go ?'

I shook my head.

"Not so much as most authors. Let me think. I've not got much of a memory for questions. Easily the outstanding one was at Blackpool. I was lecturing to an absolutely packed hall of members of the Co-op. On America it was, and when I had finished there came a voice from right at the back. 'Can Mr. Mais tell us this? Is the Americans as aristocratic as wot we is?' That's my top note so far."

"I don't believe it ever happened."

"Nor does anybody else. I ought to have had a record made of it at the time. At an Unemployment talk in Barrow-in-Furness a Communist once got up and shouted: 'You can keep your stale buns and weak tea. They stink of the Vicar's wife.'"

"That was scarcely a question. I like the first one better. So you're not always popular. I should have thought you always carried your audience."

"By no means. After a lecture to the Newcastle Women's Luncheon Club I got a letter from the secretary: 'I am afraid that it is impossible for me to ask you to talk to us again as on the last occasion you visited us you treated our members so much like naughty children that they resented it.'"

She opened her eyes wide.

"What on earth had you said ?"

"I suggested that if they wanted to see England properly they should take a leaf out of Robert Louis Stevenson's book and travel with a donkey. As some of them were fat and all of them were rich they took it as a personal affront. Because in one of my novels I had said that the women of Lincoln had faces like horses I had to have police protection for my lecture in Lincoln. It must be the first time in the history of England that a lecturer has had to have police protection when talking on books. It did my heart good to have an audience of police to talk to on Plato and Dante. My worst gaff

was to an audience of young convicts at Lewes Prison. I had no idea how to amuse them. They were all lads of spirit. My opening sentence was : ' The trouble with you fellows is that you don't get out enough. What you ought to do is to get out over the Downs more.' The laughter at that point nearly raised the prison roof. I didn't have to worry about the rest of my talk."

" Why did you make such play to-night about your being fat, and why did you constantly call attention to your advancing age as if you were in your dotage ? You aren't fat, and you aren't old."

" That's just another trick that my brain plays me. I don't feel old and I know I'm not fat, but I suddenly look at someone in the audience who is, and I pretend that I am to him, so that he shall feel young and slim."

" Very altruistic, but not convincing. I believe that you're laughing at your audience half the time. They'd never forgive you if they found out."

" Like Newcastle."

" Like Newcastle. Hell knows no fury like a woman told to travel with a donkey. You shouldn't do it."

" But it's such fun. It's like after-dinner speaking."

" You enjoy after-dinner speaking ? "

" I do. One of my many ambitions that are little likely to be fulfilled is to die suddenly as I sit down after a really good after-dinner speech ' grossly, full of bread.' The only better death that I can think of is to break my neck in the hunting field, and that is equally unlikely because I can't afford to ride to hounds. For the sake of humanity it would be better if most of us died immediately before making our usual after-dinner speech."

" A strange reason to like it only because it may kill you."

" After a really good after-dinner speech I should be well content to die. But by really good I mean of the standard of Birkenhead, Dewar and Marshall Hall. Nearly everybody can speak well. Practically nobody does. Have you ever seen a steam-hammer in a steel furnace ? "

"No, what's that got to do with it?"

"It descends on the ingot of steel to stamp it into a railway-carriage wheel once every second ponderously, inevitably, exactly as after-dinner speakers stamp out exactly identical platitudes and no power on earth can prevent it. I find myself only too often sharing Logan Pearsall Smith's premonitory horrors."

"Logan Pearsall Smith's what?"

"Premonitory horrors. Don't you remember? 'For the Pen,' said the Vicar, 'and in the sententious pause that followed I felt that I would offer any gifts of gold to arrest or postpone the solemn, inevitable, and yet, as it seemed to me, perfectly appalling statement that the Pen is mightier than the Sword.' In after-dinner speeches your choice is limited. The audience is so befuddled with food and wine that if you talk sense they'll take it as an insult. You are reduced to reminiscences, downright rudeness or retailing salacious stories for which I have neither the inclination nor the memory. I usually rely on rudeness, and I pass for a wit."

"And yet you like making after-dinner speeches?"

"I refuse all dinners where I'm not asked to speak. The state of nerves to which the anticipation reduces me means that my digestive organs function properly and I am full of excitement. Merely to eat, drink and listen to other people would drive me desperate with boredom. If there has to be drivel I prefer to listen to my own brand. Have you ever been to a Foyle's luncheon party?"

"A which?"

"Foyle is a bookseller in the Charing Cross Road. He has a most enterprising daughter Christina who cashed in heavily on the general desire of idle women to see their favourite authors in the flesh. Month after month she collects about a couple of thousand of them, who pay six bob a head to have luncheon in Grosvenor House and afterwards listen to 'a few words' from about a dozen of the most prolific writers of the age."

"How does she keep her speakers down to their proper limit?"

"She doesn't. I remember a luncheon where I was speaking on dress in the place of Schiapirelli when Sir Walter Gilbey talked so long that all the two thousand guests began to talk among themselves and drowned his voice completely."

"What do you know about dress?"

"Nothing. I used to report all the mannequin parades, I've talked about pretty well everything. I've addressed Musical Conferences, Rotary Conferences, Teachers' Conferences, Art Galleries, National Trust audiences, dentists, doctors, auctioneers, I've talked on the League of Nations. I even once took the chair at the Caxton Hall for a debate between the followers of fox-hunting and the anti-blood-sports people. I enjoyed that. There would have been a free fight if I hadn't kept a pretty severe control over the audience. Anæmic, hysterical women were writhing and hissing like a lot of snakes below the platform while up in the gallery a crowd of beefy, red-faced hunting men kept on coming out with loud hunting cries to express their disapproval of the other side. I saw very little sportsmanship on either side."

"I should think you would make an ideal chairman."

"I've suffered from so many that I'm beginning to know what to avoid."

"Have you ever had any famous chairmen?"

"The Lord Chief Justice took the chair for me at a drawing-room meeting where I was describing the human boy and he laughed loudly the whole way through. Osbert Sitwell took the chair for me at Sheffield and took down copious notes on the backs of stray envelopes and then couldn't read what he had written. He was witty but very nervous. E. V. Lucas always reads his speeches from tiny scraps of paper about the size of postage stamps. A. P. Herbert raises his chin at odd moments as if someone had hit him sharply under the jaw. Ian Hay turns his programme round and round very delicately as if he were about to have it pressed. The Archbishop of Canterbury is a little too smooth and makes the second *o* of octopus long. A Scottish

law lord, I think his name was Lord Sandys or Lord Sandeman, gave me a severe dressing-down for daring to extol the work of the younger novelists. Normally my chairmen are not men of any fame or ability, but just local big-wigs who have to show themselves every now and then to show that they're taking an interest."

"Parsons, I suppose, being the worst?"

"Parsons, on the contrary, are always the best. The finest testimony I ever got was from my chairman at Falkirk, who was a parson. The parson at Oxted began by saying, 'We all know and love those two ducks Ananias and Sapphira.'"

"Ananias and Sapphira weren't exactly what I should call ducks."

"No. That's what the audience thought. They, like you, were not readers of my novels. I once wrote a novel in which I christened two ducks by those names, and he, poor soul, thought that everybody would be familiar with them. A parson in Liverpool once produced rum from his vestry to warm me. Parsons as chairmen are unexpectedly brief and often witty. I have an annual encounter with the Presbyterian minister at Hove, whose name is A. J. Young."

I paused. The girl looked up.

"Well, why tell me his name? Ought I to know it?"

"You will before you're grey-haired, if you care anything for poetry. I've lectured for his society for about a dozen years running, and only discovered myself last year that he was a distinguished poet. Authors aren't usually modest, and when I read his poems I couldn't believe that it was the same man. You look out for A. J. Young."

"Parsons may not always be able to entertain lavishly, though the best pre-lecture dinner I ever ate was with the rector of Bushey, and I have twice had to sleep in bedrooms in the vicarages of bachelor parsons where the walls have been streaming and the sheets were wet as pulp; but I'd far rather have a parson or a doctor as chairman than a mayor."

"Headmistresses are usually pleasantly brief, but

strangely awkward and shy in front of their own pupils. I've never quite been able to understand that.

"I once addressed a Conference of Librarians, and the Mayor of the town made a long speech of welcome and then disappeared without even suggesting that it might be in order for the chairman to stay and listen for a little."

"What a blow for your pride."

"I remember calling attention to the fact that Mayors were seldom interested in books, which reminds me of a Mayor of another town who was so interested in reading that he presided over a meeting of the town children who had come to hear me talk on 'Why we Read.' He took about twenty minutes introducing me and then turned with a gesticulating finger to me and said: 'Do you know why the children of Podsnap read, Mr. Mais?' They didn't look as if they did but I had to take his word for it that they did. 'They read,' he went on 'for accuracy. There are six thousand children in Podsnap. Five thousand of these children take books out of the Public Library. Is there any other town in England where over 90 per cent of the children take books out of the Public Library?' And on that climax he sat down. I couldn't resist it. When I got up I said that either the Mayor was a liar or didn't read."

"I should think that went down well. Do you always abuse your chairman?"

"It's always a fairly safe card to play. There are sure to be a good number of women in the audience who feel that their husbands ought to be on the platform instead."

"Oh! These platform competitions. I have had some. The long procession in order of social pre-eminence. What hatreds they cause. 'Oh, Mrs. Hickethwaite, would you mind very much not sitting on the platform this week. You see——'"

"Oh! You know Mrs. Hickethwaite? I had 'supper' there."

"Yes. I knew that. That was the sop offered her. She kicked up such a fuss because we had the last

lecturer, he was a Red Indian, vegetarian, non-smoker, everything she most admires, staying here. You've no idea the feuds aroused by you lecturers. No wonder you're so conceited. We had Masefield once. He refused to come in to dinner and said that he always went for a long solitary walk before lecturing, and never ate a thing."

"That's quite true. He always does that."

"I thought it was because he couldn't bear the sight of us. I suppose we are rather forbidding. Don't you ever get put off by the people you meet?"

"I certainly do. I once went all the way up from Sussex to Cowdenbeath."

"Where's that?"

"In Fife. It was snowing heavily. There was no one to meet me. The audience made hearty noises eating things out of bags—I don't mind the sound of knitting needles, they're soothing. They remind me of the French Revolution, but I draw the line at sucking sweets. They weren't listening. I was terribly tired. At the end of an hour I gave it up, and all the Secretary said as he saw me out into the snowy night was 'We expected twa hours. Ye only gave us yin. Short measure, I'm thinkin', ye ought only to get half your fee.' And he wrote a letter of protest to my agent."

"Do you get many letters of protest?"

"Westcliff once complained that I was paid to speak for two hours. As the fee was six guineas I think they expected a little too much for their money. Have you ever tried to entertain a stodgy crowd who really don't appreciate anything but slides (which I don't use) for two hours?"

"I shouldn't care to try for two minutes. Do you ever have any, what do you call 'em, incidents, funny things happening?"

"A fire broke out in a huge hall in Manchester in the middle of a lecture—I was going to tell Mrs. Hickletwaite about that—and I was tremendously impressed because no one moved, and even when the place was full of smoke and the fireman started smashing in the

woodwork I kept them all looking at and listening to me. That was a strain. The papers next day were full of it. 'Even a fire at his lecture did not put him out,' said one. 'Panic averted at a lecture' was the *Daily Express* headline. 'Mr. Mais so captivated his audience that they went on listening quietly and took no notice of the disturbance.' By far the most unexpected and most pleasant ovation I ever got was at Wigan where I was met at the station by a howling mob of students from the technical college where I was giving away the prizes. I was driven through the cobbled streets in the rain in a coach and four, and on the steps of the college formally presented with a miniature pair of clogs."

"You seem to do every kind of talking. Do you like giving away prizes?"

"It's not easy to think out something fresh to say to each prize-winner, and their hands are sometimes as clammy and limp as an Indian's, but it makes me feel terribly important, and it gives me a chance to burst out with some of my educational ideals."

"Not I hope 'Dear boys and girls, I never won a prize in my life, and see, h'm, h'm, what a success I have made of my life.'"

She laughed happily. "No, I don't think you'd do that. Anyway you probably did win prizes at school."

"If I did I must have sold them."

"You like giving the more uplift talks best? You ought to talk to Rotary."

"I do."

"Don't you like that?"

"No. Emphatically no."

"Why not?"

"Because they don't pay, and because I always like a mixed audience. I prefer a women's luncheon club to a man's Rotary luncheon, but a judicious mixture gives me the most spontaneity. Men alone are terribly heavy. Then there's the rush of Rotary. The meal is poor and has to be eaten at terrific speed. There are long messages to be read out, and invariably the President apologises for giving me five minutes less than

he said he would. 'It's very unfortunate,' they all say, 'we've overrun our time, and we must be out by twenty-five. It's now two-seven. You will be a good chap, and keep it short, won't you?' And I am expected to outline my whole American tour or my theories about unemployment in eighteen minutes. Do you wonder that I talk fast? Wherever I go this happens. It's as inevitable as the evening shows when the hall is half filled. The Secretary will come along with a wry face and say: 'You know, Mr. Mais, it is most unfortunate that we chose this night (trying to put the blame on me for the snowstorm or rain), but it clashes with the first night of our local operatic company, and there are two political meetings, and the cinemas have a very special attraction this week, Shirley Temple, a wonderful child, don't you think?' Do I think?"

"What a disheartening life. But you don't seem to let it get you down."

"There are compensations—this, for instance. But imagine yourself newly come to a town trying to find the hall you are lecturing in, seeing a vast queue lining the street. How your heart leaps up. You come to it, and find that your show is next door, that no one knows anything about it, that it may be on the second floor. You find on the third floor a door with a notice on it in pencil: 'Lecture. To-night at 8. Speaker S. P. B. Mais.' You open a door, see a boy poking a stove, rows of empty benches, the wind blowing the curtains, an old woman in the front row with an ear trumpet, and the local half-wit sneezing in a corner."

"Now, now. This is the imaginative novelist speaking. How often do you find it like that?"

"Often enough to make me refuse all offers unless I am adequately paid and given an approximate idea of the number of people likely to turn up. It's no use preparing a discourse on Plato for Warwickshire farm-labourers. I did that once."

"I bet they liked it."

"They loved it, but Plato wouldn't have, but it isn't only country audiences that suddenly fail. I once



This Unknown Island

(Above) *Dovedale*

(Below) *Schiehallion*



This Unknown Island. -- Innerdale

went up to Oxford to give a talk on Unemployment in New College Hall. I had been debating on the same subject in the Union at Cambridge the week before and the place was packed from floor to gallery. When I got to New College I was shown in to Senior Common Room where a large circle of dons and friends were drinking port after dinner. 'A pleasant company,' I thought, 'to be on the platform with me.' The Warden rose, apologised to the company, and left them there to go on drinking port. We had an audience of five. The last time I was in Oxford I was addressing the Next Five Years Group. The talk was in the Town Hall. There was a splendid crowd mounting the stairs. 'I'm afraid,' said the Secretary, 'that we're in one of the Committee rooms. There's a rival show in the main hall. The Labour Party have got Naomi Mitchison down. A great draw.' Naomi Mitchison. One of my own pupils."

"How good for you."

"I wonder. It was unpaid of course."

"Does a fat fee make you speak better?"

"What makes me speak best is on those rare occasions when I don't get a flat fee, but take half the gross profits and fill the hall. In one afternoon and evening at Worthing last year the receipts were £57 11s. It isn't princely. Dickens wouldn't have given one of his readings for that, but it seemed riches to me."

"And to me. Do you speak better in the afternoon or night?"

"I don't think it makes much odds. The only time my brain really functions is in the early morning."

"Not the most popular time of day for lectures."

"I talked to a thousand girls at Cheltenham College from nine to ten in the morning once. Conferences always seem to want me in the morning. I have made a speech at dawn. That was to save me from being lynched by a disappointed mob of one thousand four hundred and forty hikers." I told her the story of the sun that failed to rise on Chanctonbury. "I have talked in a shop at Southsea at tea-time over the rattle of tea-cups.

That was an ordeal, especially as an old lady, in her anxiety to see what was going on, fell down a flight of stairs and smashed into a lot of crockery. I don't like the undercurrent of tinkling tea-spoons. In Edinburgh once I was talking to the Women's Luncheon Club, and the service was so slow that I had to begin my talk while they were eating their sweet. The handicap is too great. The only people who can eat and listen at the same time are the silent orders of monks."

"Which of all your speechifyings do you like best?"

"My annual village cricket dinner, because as Chairman I exercise complete control from seven o'clock until eleven. I can cut people short."

"Oh! How do you do that?"

"I learnt that at a dinner of the Hereford Chamber of Commerce where I was the Guest of Honour. As the Guest of Honour I expected to be the only speaker. There were nineteen speakers, and the Chairman had a light fixed in front of each speaker which turned red when he came to his time limit. And I like my cricket dinner because we are always rude about each other first as we are in the Odd Volumes."

"The Odd Volumes?"

"I'll tell you about that later, or . . . good heavens! look at the clock. Have I been talking all that time?"

"It's early yet. Have some whisky. The bridge players have hardly started. If you go to bed I shall have to play bridge."

"You don't play?"

"I'd rather talk to you."

"You mean listen to me talking."

"You haven't finished telling me about your cricket dinner."

"Well at an ordinary lecture there's always someone with the kind of hacking intermittent cough that is almost as disturbing as the garden-gate slamming at irregular intervals during a high wind in the night. At the cricket dinner they're all my friends, and they're all eating and drinking much too much to have time to remember to cough or blow their noses. There's none

of that irritation caused by late-comers. No one comes late to a dinner. And then there's this business of speaking on an empty stomach. You'd be surprised at the number of places I have to go to speak at eight o'clock with no chance of getting food beforehand and all they can rise to afterwards is a cup of inferior coffee with a biscuit in the vestry. That's why I always take a flask of whisky when I can remember it. There are still people who regard this habit with horror. I asked my chairman at the Hoylake Y.M.C.A. where I saw no chance of getting warm where I could get a drink and most unwillingly he guided me to the doors of a public house. He wouldn't accompany me inside. He preferred his principles to good manners. And then at my cricket dinner there is no tactless Chairman to remind me that the last speaker, though much more famous than I am, was an 'awful flop,' or that he was so good that 'to-night is bound to come as an anti-climax.' "

"Yes, I can see that a cricket dinner must be restful after the hectic way you usually spend your nights. Don't you ever lose your temper? "

"I wasn't terribly pleased at arriving at Purley to find another lecturer in possession. The secretary had told me the wrong night. At great expense of time and money I went North from Devon to attend the dinner of the Annual Conference of a very well-known commodity as the Guest of Honour. When I got there I found that I was the twelfth on the list of speakers, and they had put me down to reply to the Toast of the Press. I had to listen to speaker after speaker unloading all the funny stories that he had specially collected for the occasion. When I got up most of the audience were asleep or drunk. I was tired, bored and angry. I pretended never to have heard of the commodity, mistook it for a new form of motor bicycle. That shook them. But I am far more often pleased than annoyed. I remember going up to Kendal Milne's Manchester store. This is how the Chairman introduced me: 'I missed Mr. Mais at the station, so I tried to telephone to his home in Sussex, and in speaking to the directory

inquiry started to spell his name M—A——, but the operator said: ‘Oh, that’s the man who writes the lovely books.’ It isn’t often that a Chairman makes me blush, but that Chairman did. I seem to have lectured in every kind of place from a drawing-room to a barn, from a chapel to the top of the Downs, and to every type of audience from convicts to the National Union of Teachers, from society débutantes to unemployed Welsh miners, from officers in the R.A.F. to small boys in preparatory schools, from the employees of Selfridge, W. H. Smith, the Bank of England and the Prudential Assurance Company to undergraduates of St. Andrews, the Y.M.C.A., the Dickens Fellowship, and a Fencing Club.”

“Indeed you seem to have covered pretty well every type of Englishman. Haven’t you ever lectured abroad?”

“I certainly have. But isn’t it time for you to go to bed? Aren’t you getting tired?”

“I certainly am not. There’s plenty more to drink. Your throat must be absolutely parched. Now tell me about lecturing abroad.”

“Right. And if you go to sleep don’t blame me.” As a matter of fact she was asleep in about a couple of minutes.

As I finished telling the story of my Dutch tour the girl stirred in her sleep, opened her eyes, yawned luxuriously, stretched and murmured hazily:

“It must be lovely to be a lecturer. Do tell me some of your experiences.”

As I rose to my feet I said:

“Not to-night if you don’t mind. I’m rather sleepy. I think if you’ll forgive me I’ll go to bed. I’ve got an early train to catch in the morning.”

“Oh! what a pity. I did so want to talk to you. Do you like lecturing?”

“And talking, tremendously, especially to you. Good night.”

Chapter XIII

BROADCASTING

“ **I**T must be a grand thing to be a broadcaster.”

“ Why ? ”

“ To know that your audience runs into millions, and that your every word is being listened to with rapt attention and . . . ”

“ Stop. That begs a few questions. How are you to know that your audience runs into millions, how do you know that you are being listened to with rapt attention ? You may be receiving less attention than a tap left dripping in the kitchen.”

“ If you were you wouldn't be asked to broadcast twice.”

“ There's no means by which the B.B.C. can gauge whether a man is a good broadcaster or not. In my view there's no such thing as a trained broadcaster. It's not like lecturing. Everybody can broadcast if he has something to say, and nobody can broadcast if he hasn't. By far the most convincing broadcast I ever heard was from an anonymous miner. He told us about the sorts of books he read. He made all us professional broadcasters look very small by comparison. He was a man. He had something to say. He said it like a man. Far too many broadcasters act, act the politician, act the parson, act the bluff good-natured uncle, act worst of all the facetious buffoon. No, the worst type is the broadcaster who 'acts the natural' broadcaster. It isn't easy for a man to be entirely himself in front of an audience. And it is less easy in front of a microphone. The odd thing is that his mannerisms, good or bad, are amplified by the machine, so that his effeminacy or masculinity is almost grotesquely exaggerated. If he sinks for a moment into ordinariness he sounds tedious as a twice-told tale dulling the drowsy ears of a tired man. If he

gets the least bit of enthusiasm into his voice he sounds like a fire-eating fanatic. If he has the slightest cold in the head he sounds as if he had adenoids."

"You mean that wireless distorts both the speaker's virtues and vices."

"Not distorts, magnifies them. A good man sounds better than he deserves, and a bad man sounds worse. And this influence extends beyond the studio."

"How?"

"Before I ever broadcast I had been writing for about ten years and published twenty books. In a single post after broadcasting I have received more letters from listeners than I had received from readers in the whole of the previous ten years."

"You mean that broadcasting brings you into the limelight?"

"I mean that broadcasting blinds you. Before I broadcast the mention of my name brought no smile of recognition to the reception clerk of an hotel, but after broadcasting I had only to open my mouth in any public place for people to come up and acclaim me at once. In strange towns I had no chance even of giving my name to the shop assistants. They would always forestall me."

"Very head-turning."

"Very. You are apt to imagine that you really have achieved something when every time you open your mouth your voice is recognised by complete strangers."

"Did you jump into the limelight straight away?"

"By no means. I began in 1923 in Cardiff. I was invited to go down every Tuesday evening from London to broadcast on the Regional programme a series of talks on and readings from the works of John Masefield. Apparently I was expected to occupy the nation's time for two hours.

I am astounded even now at my temerity, not in accepting this, but in going down week after week and relying entirely on the inspiration of the moment for my words. I wrote nothing out. I would say, for instance: 'Here's a jolly poem by Masefield on fox-hunting called "Reynard

the Fox." Let me read you his description of the scene just before the meet.' Then I would read a great chunk and the director would interpolate a hunting song when he thought fit, after which I would start off again: 'It's a funny thing that one of the best poems about the sea, "The Ancient Mariner," should have been written by a man who had never been to sea, and that the best poem about hunting should be by a man who has never hunted in his life.' In fact I used the microphone exactly as I used the desk at Rossall, Sherborne and Tonbridge.

"I enjoyed giving these talks. They were full of awkward pauses, unprepared readings, fumbblings for the apt word of appreciation. They were in reality a running commentary on books that I was reading for the first time at the microphone, a running commentary by a man with no technical training at all.

"I got no fan mail. I was treated with the silence I deserved. I was turned off. When I got home after my first attempt I wrote the following account of it:

"I have just returned from my first attempt at broadcasting. For two hours I stammered into a devilish engine made of tin, in shape exactly like a miniature of Laxey wheel. I had travelled all the way to Cardiff to meet this sinister wheel, which had neither sound nor motion. It was as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean. It sat like Patience on a monument unsmiling at my grief.

"'It's time for you to begin,' the dictator said. He turned on a light and I stepped forward. With clammy hands I grasped the pillar which held the instrument. I searched for words, but all words, both good and bad, deserted me.

"I mumbled incoherently. I began a sentence and didn't like it. At all costs, I felt, I had to go on. The director crept up to me and whispered. 'Too fast,' he said, 'too jerky; keep the voice even.'

"I longed for some book to read to my audience. I hadn't a scrap of paper or a single note. For two hours I was expected to keep an unseen host intelligently entertained. I searched through the mental blanket that

enveloped my brain and swamped my imagination to visualise my listeners.

“I began to talk as if they were a pack of school-girls; I became maudlin, dictatorial, superior and sentimental.

“It then struck me that a fiery, retired Anglo-Indian colonel might be listening; I trembled as I thought of his ears being offended by my audacity in trying to teach him. I became, in consequence, for the next minute or so, almost Uriah Heepish in my humility.

“Then I bethought me of riotous seafaring men or farmers in a bar parlour. I became truculent and explosive; I even ventured on humour, and laughed into the machine. I shall never forget that laugh. The machine seemed to hit me in the face for my ill-placed levity; the laugh died away in a wail, and the balloon of my self-conceit was pricked.

“I shut my eyes, and the shades of curates and chorus girls, milliners and bus-conductors, stockbrokers and station-masters passed before my vision like all the ghosts of his enemies before Richard III on the eve of Bosworth.

“I was completely at sea. The more I floundered, the more fiercely I gripped the machine, trying to shake it out of its stupor into betraying some verdict on my words.

“Out of the silence there came no hand-clap, no hiss, not even the whirr of an engine. I might as well be on a desert island chanting faint hymns to the cold, fruitless moon for all the good I was doing.

“In agony, I gave a backward glance at the clock. Surely my time must nearly be up. Two hours was not, after all, eternity. I was petrified to find that at the end of what I had taken to be an hour and a half I had been talking for twenty minutes.

“Luckily, my entertainment was broken into by songs and recitations. Wildly I glared at my director beckoning to him to release me, and I broke off in the middle of a sentence to be almost carried out of the ring to recover, while a baritone, completely at his ease, sang as if he were in the Albert Hall.

"Like lightning the song ended, and I was on my feet again for the second round. I spoke as if I were reading the lessons in church for ten minutes, and then collapsed again in the arms of the reciter, who distracted the poor audience while I was being sponged and towelled for the third round.

"By the end of an hour and three-quarters I was at last getting into my stride. They must all be asleep by now, I thought: I can say what I like. I had in mind a brilliant peroration when——

"'London calling,' said the director. 'That's enough.'

"I had not even the strength left to smash the devilish instrument which had sapped all my energy for 105 minutes.

"'You should hear Professor ——,' said the director. 'He makes us rock with laughter when he talks.'

"I should like to meet the Professor. Rock with laughter? I, who felt as if I had been in the boxing ring for 105 years, felt more like death than laughter.

"And I still can't believe that anybody heard me, certainly nobody as far away as Brighton."

Four years later I approached the head of the Talks Department, Hilda Matheson, with the suggestion that I should give a talk on following hounds on foot. This was accepted after some demur and no alacrity.

I gave the talk, and for the first time in my life received a fan mail. Without exception the letters were abusive. The more lurid were anonymous and preferred post cards.

One ran: "The sooner you go back to the savages from which you are obviously sprung the better for everybody."

I quickly gathered that listeners were anti-blood-sportsmen. Or rather, that the articulate section of listeners was anti-blood-sports. I sympathised a good deal with them, for I, too, loathe the killing of foxes.

I was advised by the B.B.C. not to send in any more suggestions. They preferred talkers to arouse delight rather than antagonism. I desisted from making any further suggestions.

Some time later I was asked to appear before the Committee of the Central Council for School Broadcasting and submit a series of educational talks. I met for the first time since she came down from Oxford, Mary Somerville, the Secretary of this council, who did most of the work in helping me to get out a suitable scheme.

"The thing to insist upon in this business," she kept on repeating, "is the fun of the thing. Do you think that you can get elementary school children to see the fun that is to be got out of writing and reading?"

"I very much doubt it," I said. "It took me all my time to get older Public School boys to see it."

She laughed. "But these children," she said, "want to learn."

We devised a series to be called "Delight in Books," in which I was to try to inspire children to read diaries, letters, autobiographies, biographies, books of travel, novels, plays and ballads.

The committee, which included George Sampson, Henry Newbolt, W. W. Vaughan, and a number of H.M.I.s and headmasters and headmistresses, was most sympathetic, and allowed me to try all my experiments without let or hindrance.

Some little time later I was asked by Mary Somerville to come up for an audition in reading poetry.

I went up with a poem of Hardy, a poem of Housman, and a poem of Brooke very carefully rehearsed. I read them before a microphone in a large empty hall in which sat Mary Somerville and my old pupil, Joe Ackerley, now on the staff of the B.B.C. When I had finished I looked at their faces.

"You can hear for yourself," said Mary Somerville, and to my surprise for the first time in forty years I heard myself speak. It was so dreadful that I could only just stick it out to the end.

So that is what my family and friends and pupils had had to endure. I had thought up to that moment that my voice was full of music, rather like Robert Harris's.

"So that's why the girl who went out when I came in was crying her eyes out," I said.

Joe nodded. "She couldn't bear the sound of her own voice," he said, and added unnecessarily, "It was a good deal better adapted for broadcasting poetry than yours is."

Mary Somerville said, "If only she could get the meaning out of the words that you do, and you could put in the music and the rhythm that she found there might perhaps be one voice between you."

I was not encouraged to read poetry over the air. But I was allowed to broadcast to schools, and I can think of nothing that I have done in the whole of my life that has given me such undiluted pleasure. I was always difficult to handle, difficult to rehearse, grumbling, cantankerous, awkward, and so nervous that I had and still have to undergo the ritual of taking off nearly all my clothes, washing nine times just before I begin, and surrounding myself with glasses of water.

I would leave the preparation of the manuscript to the last minute, write twice as much as was required, re-write the whole script after it had satisfied everybody else, interpolate long sentences which made me overrun my time, gabble passages through fear of never ending, and in every way do everything that a broadcaster should not do. I even sang impromptu songs until I was stopped.

I went over and over my manuscript till I knew it by heart. I left home hours before I need have done, fearful lest the trains should be delayed and prevent me from appearing. I dallied in a quiet Wardour Street restaurant for an hour over an omelette that I couldn't eat. Then I went down to Savoy Hill and sat for three-quarters of an hour in the studio where I was due to broadcast. This particular room, number six, was, as a matter of fact, a very happy room. It was not cramped as number four was, and there was an air of cheerfulness about it.

Unfortunately visitors elected to be shown round the B.B.C. buildings exactly at this time, and for several weeks I had to endure the presence of a crowd just when I felt least able to cope with them. Luckily I had a most patient and understanding announcer, who did his best to soothe me.

I have never faced any audience with the trepidation that I felt on facing that microphone. I was worried lest I should be going too fast, lest I should fail to be heard, lest I should be too dull. The sheets on which my talk was typed were made of blotting-paper to prevent them from rustling.

At last three o'clock struck, the red light flickered, I was warned to be ready, announced and then took control. My voice suddenly went clean out of my control and performed the most strange antics. It became now husky, now treble . . . I tried to forget myself and to imagine that there was one small child in the opposite chair and that I was talking to him or her. I was surprised to find how this simple ruse worked. In my ensuing eagerness to convince the imaginary child of the fun I got out of books I found myself waving my arms about and wagging my finger at him or her.

I finished as exhausted as I used to be at the end of a race or a fierce game of Rugger, dissatisfied with myself, but tremendously happy that I had at last a chance of spreading my gospel about the love of books.

As the weeks went by, and I got more and more appreciative letters from listeners, I warmed more and more to my work. At last I seemed to have found something to do that was really worth while. No work that I had hitherto attempted could possibly have covered so large a field. Naturally I do not know how many listeners I had, but the fact that I had over nine hundred letters during the course was proof enough to me that I was meeting with a much more magnificent response than I had ever dared to hope.

The children began taking me into their confidence. Their friendliness made me immensely happy. My only trouble was that I found it difficult to reply to them all, much as I wanted to. Their poems, autobiographies, and short stories were amazingly various in quality, and their letters were delightfully spontaneous and natural.

The opportunity for moulding adolescent opinion by means of the wireless is so boundless as to be rather frightening when one compares it with the very limited

opportunity given to the average teacher spending himself for the sake of one small class.

My main difficulty of course lay in condensing into three thousand words, which was the limit allowed for a twenty-five-minute talk, all that I wanted to say. At any rate, broadcasting taught me to be concise, and reminded me of R. D. B.'s first warning to me when I went on to the *Daily Express*.

"If you want to be a good journalist think that every word you write is going to be cabled to Australia at your own expense."

But it isn't enough, so far as talking on the air to schools is concerned, to be succinct. You have to keep it short and snappy, informative and entertaining, and you have to contend with many factors that are not present in the studio.

I got one of the biggest shocks in my life when a blattnerphone record of my talk was taken in the morning in order that I might myself be present in a school in the afternoon to listen to its effect.

It was a convent school in a busy part of London. The girls were not in their places when the talk began, the wireless set was not working properly, buses were passing outside, and house-breakers were hard at work next door. I could scarcely hear a word of the rasping voice. When I asked the girls afterwards who it was and what he was supposed to be talking about no one knew and no one cared. It was an unfortunate experience.

I was luckier in my next attempt, which was in Chester. At the King's School I listened to my talk on *Treasure Island*, and the boys appeared to listen intelligently and to like it. Afterwards, however, when I spoke to them they refused to believe that it was the same voice.

In an unguarded moment I told my listeners that I liked getting letters. I forgot that the recipient of letters incurs a certain responsibility to reply. I found it quite impossible to answer all my correspondents, much as I wished to, but out of the hundreds, a dozen or so were not content to write just once or twice, but continued, and still continue, to send me about ten sheets of

closely-written foolscap every week, full of their most secret inspirations and worries.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the pleasure that I derived from these. I only wish that I had had either the time or the ability to answer them adequately.

It never struck me before that children would be willing, even anxious, to confide in the possessor of a voice that won their trust, when they would never dream of revealing themselves to the possessor of that voice if it ever materialized.

I am well content, with these new friends of mine, to continue to be a voice, for I feel that I know them far more intimately than I have ever known any other children, and, as a result, I am far more useful to them than I should be if they were living in the same village or house with me.

There is, undoubtedly, a huge host of boys and girls who, driven from one cause or another into themselves, find their horizons immensely enlarged and their happiness immeasurably increased if they can unburden themselves to some one person who really has their confidence.

That mine should happen to be the kind of voice that seems to invite this kind of reaction is certainly one of the happiest discoveries of my life. I began, and was content to begin, with the hope that I might stir up some of the more sluggish to share my delight in books, but from books these children have gone on to discuss life, and life to a sensitive child can be a very perplexing business.

The mere fact of being able to talk to me on paper had the delightful and unexpected effect of curing one small girl of shyness.

"I don't think I'm quite so shy with people, now," she wrote, "you know, those superior condescending sort, who seem to take an unholy delight in staring at you when you get hot and groggy, don't worry me half as much as they did. I stare back and grin at them now, because something deep down inside me is chuckling to itself and kicking up its heels for glee and saying: 'Go on—stare away—I don't care—at any rate you

haven't got half such an absolutely top-hole friend as I have.' "

This child, like others, in her turn, passed on, and forgot that she ever heard my voice, but that mattered not at all. What cannot ever be taken from me is the pleasant knowledge that at a particular and not unimportant juncture in her life I was lucky enough to be standing at the right place to stretch out a helping hand.

Another confessed that until she began to write to me all her pleasure in life was turned to misery by the fact that she was compelled to wear long-sleeved vests.

I seem to have suffered in my childhood from precisely the terrors that still haunt children to-day. I endured five ghastly years of torture at school fearing lest I should faint in chapel.

Precisely the same fear tormented one of my new young friends, until I explained that I, too, experienced exactly what she was experiencing, with the big difference that I never discovered until afterwards how common this particular fear is.

One of my correspondents described herself as my "Prickly porcupine," because she was so terribly afraid of ridicule that she even visualised the dreadful scene of my reading her letters aloud at the breakfast-table. Even my definite reassurance that I never eat breakfast and certainly never let any eyes but mine feast upon her letters failed to convince her entirely. She shed her prickles slowly.

Another, who had no qualms about her foolishness invariably signed her letters: "Your everlasting but loving fool."

Quite a number of girls were very angry that they were not boys, and requested me to call them by boys' names. No boy correspondent suggested to me that he would rather be a girl, or that he wished me to rechristen him.

The great difficulty facing the child-psychologist is his inability to collect data. Children are by nature amazingly secretive and non-committal in the presence of their elders.

I have spent my whole life among them. I am much more natural and at ease in their society than I am in a community of my contemporaries, and they do as a general rule pay me the supreme compliment of never talking either up or down to me. My sort of madness is apparently their sort of madness. We understand each other.

But I might have known Ianthe for years before she would have confessed that her main idea in life was to avoid a fussy funeral. Yet she told me this in her third letter.

Just because I am a voice and never likely to betray any secrets at home, I am told exactly how deeply Chloe loves Uncle Marmaduke and how she loathes Aunt Eleanor.

I am taken out by Anthea for long walks and allowed to share secret caves that no other person has ever shared with her.

I occupy a very intimate place in Saccharissa's heart. She sends me pieces of coal to keep me warm.

Cassandra never fails at the end of each week to send me a detailed list of all the marks she has scored in every subject.

Poor Cassandra. She prophesies failure in her exams. I think she is right. Her spelling and writing belong to no known school of thought. Her sentences have neither beginning nor end, her verses—she breaks into poetry on no provocation—lack form, rhythm, rhyme and reason.

She writes, I guess, to me because she knows that at last here is a chance of composing sheets that will not reappear scored with blue-pencil.

That is the best of being educated by a voice on the wireless. He never punishes.

The broadcaster is the lonely child's safety-valve. She can create him in her own image or whatever image she desires. He can be tall or short, bearded or clean-shaven, blue-eyed or green-eyed, exactly as she wishes. Only in the matter of voice is she restricted to the actual. To this heroic figure—she naturally endows him with

Herculean strength and the courage of a Cœur-de-Lion—she brings all her troubles, and if he is anything of a man, not in vain. He must become all things to all children; but only one sin, judging from my letters, is unforgivable. All with one sweet voice exclaim: "I do hope you are not bald." Luckily, I am not.

Affected perhaps by my totally unexpected success with schools I, greatly daring, ventured to submit my name as candidate for Director of Adult Education on the North Regional.

I have applied for most posts in the world that are advertised in *The Times* without hearing any more about them, but for this I was placed on the short list and granted an interview. I was called before an imposingly large committee or board, of which the tall rather imperious Sir John Reith was Chairman. He asked me whether I really wanted the job, whereupon some imp impelled me to reply that I would rather be headmaster of Winchester. I was not selected.

When ten years later I put in for the post of Director of Talks I was not included on the short list.

On the other hand my success with schools brought me to the notice of the talks department of which Hilda Matheson was at that time still the Head.

We had moved from Savoy Hill to Portland Place where the studios were much more convenient. 3B from which I usually broadcast is small, simple and friendly. 3D where most literary talks are given is small, complex and most unfriendly. Its walls are lined with faked books to give it the appearance of a library. Everywhere there are exotic expensive flowers and exotic expensive pictures.

I now met Eric Maschwitz again. I had known him when he was a struggling novelist just down from Cambridge. He had now become editor of the *Radio Times*, and under the pseudonym of Holt Marvell he was both producing broadcast plays and broadcasting himself. He invited me to hold debates with him on the air in a series called "Encounters."

We had a delightful slash at each other over

“Sun-bathing” in the spring of 1931, and followed it up with a series of six discussions in September, 1931, on “Living Dangerously,” which attracted a good deal of attention.

The *Manchester Guardian* described “the pyrotechnics of this week’s two discussions” as “very cheering. . . . Both Mr. Holt Marvell and Mr. S. P. B. Mais had thoroughly primed themselves with lists of adventures which were fired at the listener at speeds varying from uncomfortable to impossible.”

One paper said: “I know little about Mr. Mais except from articles of his which I have occasionally read. Is he poor? Is he always losing his job because of the outrageous, divinely heretical things he says and does?”

The *Observer*’s comment was: “They talked very much more nonsense than most debaters amidst plenty of excellently suggestive sense.” The *Methodist Leader* took us to task for our “vehemence and velocity.”

The only thing I can remember about the series is finding a basket on my doorstep on my return from one of these discussions. In it was an enormous live rat, and attached to it a piece of paper bearing the words: “Now live dangerously.”

In January 1932 came my great chance. There had been complaints and representations made to the B.B.C. that they had failed to show any readiness to praise the leading holiday resorts. The B.B.C.’s reply was to send for me and commission me to go out on seventeen excursions through “This Unknown Island” in search of beauty and adventure. I was given complete freedom of choice. It was a trip exactly after my heart. The only trouble was that I wasn’t given time to do justice to my subject.

I was due in London every Wednesday afternoon to give my weekly broadcast to schools on books. That meant that I couldn’t start off on my exploration of the week until Thursday, and I found it essential to get back to my home on Saturday in order to compress my mass of material into coherent order and trim it into a twenty-

minutes' discourse. This took me the whole of Sunday and Monday. And when I got to the microphone at 9.25 on Monday night I was usually still eliminating and revising my script. It was impossible really to expect to get anything of the spirit of a place in a couple of days, and I was quite staggered to find the degree of interest that I immediately aroused.

I made a trial excursion to St. Peter's-on-the-Wall in Essex and it was a complete failure, so I scrapped it.

I decided to give my first actual talk on Haworth, and it so happened that when I arrived at the "Black Bull" inn on New Year's Eve snow was falling heavily and youthful mummers in strange disguise were singing in the streets. I walked through the snowy night over the moor to Wuthering Heights and came nearer to Heathcliff and Catherine than ever I dared to hope. I recovered normality a little at the Watch Night service in the dimly-lighted church, but the whole place was eerie, and I felt more than a little fey.

I couldn't help giving a good talk. It almost wrote itself. It was the first of the series and the best. It brought me letters from Yorkshiremen, Brontë lovers, and even members of the Brontë family from all over the world.

Perhaps the limit of eulogy was reached by the correspondent from Shrewsbury who wrote :

"Only too rare are the opportunities given to the B.B.C. victims to listen to one with the soul of a poet, the mind of a scholar, and the character of a gentleman."

But any tendency to become swollen-headed was frustrated by a Scarborough correspondent who preferred to preserve his anonymity :

"To-night I switched on to Daventry at 9.35 to hear the B.B.C. orchestra as per time. You are gassing as I write this at 9.43, you talking potato. Cannot you silly gas-bags realise that the vast majority of listeners expect programmes to be carried out to time? Get

back to your unfortunate village and on the Green there spout to your damned silly self till the cows come home.

“WELL-WISHER.”

It was a timely reminder that even a scholar, poet and gentleman ought to be punctual. But it was not on that occasion wholly my fault.

I had started my talk four minutes late and told that I was not to look at the clock, but give myself my allotted twenty minutes, so I was not due to stop till 9.44.

This sin of over-running my time was brought up against me in letters to the *Radio Times*. It was not until I broadcast in the United States, where you are timed to a split second, that I realised how heinous my offence was.

“One cannot switch off,” said one correspondent, “for one doesn’t know when a speaker will think fit to stop and give others a chance: one can only listen with growing indignation and rising resentment until one is in no mood to enjoy what is left of the item this selfish appropriation of time that the speaker has no right to have spoilt.”

“If a speaker will not shut up when he is told, get someone else who will,” wrote another correspondent. “Talk is cheap, and talkers equally so.”

“Mr. Mais is one of the few talkers we like,” said someone else, “but he is a great offender in this respect.”

My excuse was that I was not given adequate time either to collect my material or to deliver my talk.

I covered in these seventeen weeks no fewer than fifteen thousand miles in addition to doing my other work and giving broadcasts on other subjects.

The temptation was very severe to include “just a sentence more” on this incident or that place. I was so enthusiastic that I really believed that it mattered whether I included or omitted these precious sentences. I had forgotten my maxim about brevity being in some sense the condition of being inspired.

I went from Haworth to Glastonbury, and there again met with an eerie experience. Exactly as I got to the

waiting-room of the tiny terminus of the old Somerset and Dorset Railway at Bridgwater late at night in another storm the waiting-room door opened and a tall gaunt woman fell forward with the cry: "I am going to die." With her was a small girl clutching a doll, with a group of parcels lying at her feet.

It was a strange beginning to my visit to King Arthur and St. Joseph of Arimathea. She was a Hardy-esque figure. She had just discovered that her husband had deserted from the army and disappeared. In Glastonbury, in spite of sleeping in the famous haunted Abbot's Room at the George Inn, I saw no ghost, but I saw the miracle of the Holy Thorn in full flower in the first week of January. I was shown the very kitchen where King Alfred burnt the cakes and the soggy marsh where the last battle was fought on English soil. I found this a sufficiently romantic neighbourhood to occupy much more than a twenty-minute talk, so perhaps I may have succumbed to my old trick of talking too fast. Anyway the reaction of one lady from Falmouth resulted in this letter:

"As I know Wells very well may I venture to make a little correction as to the famous clock? It isn't *mice* that run round and are decapitated, but four *Knights*."

Correspondents were always "venturing to make little corrections," but I have a special affection for this one. This version of "Dickory, Dickory Dock" in which the mice ran round instead of up the clock was however only a figment of my correspondent's imagination. I had said *Knights*, but the microphone and her imagination (combined with my speed) had transformed that innocent-seeming word into something very different.

This taught me to articulate even more clearly and to speak more slowly. I was still, in those days, inclined to shout, "blast," or over-emphasise particular words like a tub-thumping orator instead of, as I learnt in America, treating the microphone as a soft loving ear to be nestled against and whispered into confidentially.

I went from Glastonbury to Lincolnshire to see the

home of the King's Hereditary Champion. I owed this idea to Hilda Matheson. All the other sixteen areas were my own idea.

I hurt the feelings of one correspondent by saying that I had seen the grooms in Boston market sucking straws, but I think he was looking for trouble, because he also doubted the statement that I had seen sheep grazing in Spalding churchyard. And I committed the mistake of daring to call the Fen farmers prosperous. To call any English farmer prosperous is the quickest way I know (after praising fox-hunting) to collect letters of protest.

From Lincolnshire I went to Derbyshire to walk over Kinderscout—which is mainly a grouse preserve—and to go down a lead mine. I made the interesting discovery that no coal-miner will go down a lead mine, and that no lead-miner will willingly face a descent into the coal-pit.

And then I walked in a bitter wind along the Roman Wall and mentioned casually how comforting I found the whisky in the "Twice-Brewed" inn. This doubled my correspondence. Every temperance enthusiast in the country wrote to expostulate, accusing me of being subsidised by the distillers, and of leading listeners to perdition. The more kindly suggested that the way to keep out the cold was not to drink whisky, but to wrap newspapers round my stomach, drink ginger wine, wear six concentric overcoats, pour whisky down my spine, or eat humbugs. I accepted one suggestion, which was the purchase of a wind-proof suit.

One Novocastrian wrote to the B.B.C. asking them not to permit me "to discourse on our county again," on the ground that I spoke of Newcastle with a short "a," thereby "poking fun at our speech." The man who would avoid treading on another's corns will be well advised to avoid the microphone.

From Northumberland I went to Cornwall for the sake of the stained glass of St. Neot, King Arthur's Castle of Tintagel, and the slate-quarries of Delabole. This excited far less comment than my Northumbrian talk, and I discovered that the Northerner is much more

interested in listening and perhaps more jealous of his own land than the man of the South and West.

So I went next to Lancashire, which was once more under snow, to explore the Trough of Bowland and to look for the witches of Pendle Hill. This time I made a Mr. Nettleton of Oxford very angry by mentioning that I was once an undergraduate of that University. "I should like," he said ironically, "to go further back and hear a description of your parents, and your home, and if you won a scholarship to enable you to go to Oxford. Last time, deducting your remarks about the snow and how cold you were, you told us nothing. I am conveying my criticism to the B.B.C." He made it sound as if he were Salome conveying my head on a charger to Herod.

A more helpful correspondent called my attention to the fact that I rarely mentioned trees. "Don't you like them?" he asked, forgetful I think of the fact that in winter when the trees are bare not many of us are capable of distinguishing the various members of the species individually.

I then went to see Nelson's home in Norfolk, and watched the reed-cutters on the Broads and some of the many industries of Norwich, which struck me as a completely foreign and most fascinating city, though I was much less impressed with the very ancient inn where I slept than I ought to have been owing to the dilatoriness of the staff.

I had to get about very quickly and of course as cheaply as possible. The cheapest rate that the head-porter at the hotel could discover for a car was a shilling a mile. I found one for myself at fourpence. And fourpence was about all I could afford, covering, as I had to, hundreds of miles a day.

From Norfolk I went to Mary Webb's country and explored the Welsh Marches in the company of a most knowledgeable and kindly country parson, who had offered, on the strength of listening to my talks, to act as my guide. He went wrong in only one particular. We climbed over the Stiperstones and Long Mynd to descend to the "Horse-Shoe" inn at Bridges at 1.50,

hungry as only two walkers can be, and comforting ourselves in anticipation with thoughts of the tankards of ale and bread and cheese that would be forthcoming. We had struck a district where the inns close at one o'clock and open again at three. I seized the occasion to slip in a sentence of protest against the anomalies of licensing hours.

This once more roused the teetotallers. They must, like the Anti-Blood-Sports enthusiasts, spend their lives writing letters.

Somebody objected to my pronunciation of Shrewsbury as "Shrowsbury," which was the way it was spelt in the sixteenth century, and someone else took the trouble to quote all the misprints in the report of this talk in the *Listener*.

The *Listener* has the right to print the manuscript of any broadcast talk, without fee. There is apparently not always time to give the speaker a chance to see a proof of his own manuscript, and the editor prints just so much of the talk as he thinks fit. As the manuscript of my talks was scribbled over and over and then not given in the form that was written out the *Listener* published reports of my talks that were very much at variance with my actual broadcast, and to accuse me of a "*nice derangement*" of names as the critic "H. C. S." did on the strength of what he read rather than on what he heard, was both absurd and unjust.

The worst misreading I ever read in the *Listener* was its report of the American Ambassador's speech introducing my "Modern Columbus" series of talks. The ambassador quoted the world-famous epitaph of the defenders of the Alamo: "Thermopylæ had its *messenger of defeat*, the Alamo had none." The *Listener* translated this as: "Thermopylæ had its *majesty of death*, the Alamos had none."

I went back to Yorkshire to explore the Dales, and as a result of telling the story of the "Hand of Glory" I received the offer of a dead hand which I naturally accepted. It never arrived. I also inspired a sixteen-year-old Scot to burst into verse.

On my next trip to Dorset I had the good fortune to

be taken round by Mrs. Thomas Hardy, and was rightly taken to task for failing to mention William Barnes.

I then crossed the Border to visit the home of Robert Burns, and the mountains of Galloway and Carrick. Two correspondents suggested that the golden eagles that I mentioned as having seen must have been buzzards, a galling correction to a Devonian to whom buzzards are as common as kestrels. A tour round the castles of South Wales brought no more exciting protest than a correction of my pronunciation of lichen.

The B.B.C. demand standardisation of pronunciation, and generally speaking I am amenable to any politely expressed desire. But not even for the B.B.C. am I prepared to pronounce *opus* as if I were an elderly spinster reprimanding her cat for getting on the breakfast table. I will not pronounce the "t" in *beret*, and I shall continue to call lichen "litchen" in spite of all remonstrance.

From South Wales I went to North Wales and a lot of people wrote to tell me where I could find peregrine falcons.

In my next area I was presented by one of the gipsies of Kirk Yetholm with a "jigger," a steel prong with a hook which gipsies jab into each other's sides at fairs, and I crossed the sea to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne by a motor-car, the driver of which was unable to tell the time.

My penultimate talk was on the Northern Highlands, where I bought, at the top of Glen Affric, a little shaggy nervous cairn, whose name, "Brochair," bothered many listeners, and I made my final excursion in the North Riding where I mispronounced Galtres and made a friend in the Keeper of the Walls of York.

My capricious "Unknown Island" tour was over. But the repercussions still continue. From that day five years ago I have been taken as an authority on the country, and by every post come requests from people wanting the addresses of cheap farms, routes mapped out for walking, riding, driving, flying and every other form of transport. I try to reply to them all, but those who include stamped addressed envelopes stand the better chance.

I got an enormous number of letters from listeners

who thanked me for reminding them of places that they had loved long since and lost awhile. Everybody likes hearing of places that are known to him. It exemplifies the truth of Johnson's acute observation that mankind ever prefers to be reminded rather than informed.

I was talking about this "Unknown Island," but when I talked about some place that really was unknown like Scrivelsby few listeners expressed any surprise or pleasure. When I mentioned Wensleydale Yorkshiremen wrote from all over the world to thank me for bringing it home to them again.

This series of talks was so successful that I have been very much surprised that the B.B.C. didn't follow it up with a second series.

I must say that my head was slightly turned by the chorus of praise I got from the Press. The *Yorkshire Post* said: "Mr. Mais has the faculty of producing the picaresque talk free from guide-book elements. This talk (on the Brontë country) contained an element of surprise from start to finish which might well be copied by other speakers."

Popular Wireless said: "What a mental tonic Mr. Mais is. What a bright, breezy, invigorating style his is, and what marvellous powers of description. I like him more and more every time I hear him."

The *Woman's Pictorial* said: "The prize for the most popular wireless talks (if there isn't one there should be!) should surely go to Mr. S. P. B. Mais for his broadcasts on out-of-the-way spots of England." *Car Topics* described me as "prince of broadcasters" and some other paper as, "The Ambassador of the Countryside."

It was all rather bewildering for one who had been writing for ten years on the beauty of the English countryside using almost the identical words. In print they left everybody relatively cold. Over the air they were rousing an ever-increasing enthusiasm.

I basked in my new-won popularity.

I was not even seriously embarrassed by Mr. Postgate's post-card from Worthing, addressed to me c/o Sir John Reith, with the words, "You make people sick when

they listen to you. If Sir Richard Grenville or Sir Walter Raleigh had found one of your kind on board, you'd have been thrown overboard as dirt which might contaminate decent living men." But I did wish that Mr. Postgate and I could have met in "The Golden Hind."

On 17th December, 1932, I broadcast from Boston parish church a description of the Dedication of the Bells which was relayed to America, and heard in Boston, Massachusetts. This was one of the very first broadcasts across the Atlantic, and I was reduced to a state of terror. It seemed to me a job of such responsibility that I should never do it justice. It was my first experience of running commentary work. Luckily it passed off all right, and my words were described in the local paper as "inspiring and ennobling."

The troublesome part of this function was that I had, for the first time in my life, to talk over something else. The psalms were being sung and lesson read while I was actually broadcasting, then I had to time my comments so that they stopped exactly as the "Nunc Dimittis" began, so that one should melt into the other, and as the Processional hymn was going on I had to describe all that was happening in the church below.

While I was building a reputation in this way with adult audiences I was also endeavouring to consolidate the position I had won with schools with "Delight in Books" by a further series on "Some Books I Like" and "More Books I Like."

I was described by one child in a Brighton school as a "jolly" man. Some correspondents said that broadcast schoolmasters were a bad thing in that they were robots and not capable of being "ragged." One correspondent of the *Radio Times* confessed to having "tears of pleasure in my eyes long before you had finished, and this at thirty-two years of age." A newspaper said that "the boy or girl who refuses to be interested in books after a few lessons by Mr. S. P. B. Mais must be strange indeed."

One result of these talks to schools was a series of invitations to visit schools all over the country and to give away the prizes at several.

My method of trying to interest school children over the air in books was to read a couple of longish and characteristic extracts in the hope that this reading would spur them on to go on with the book for themselves. One odd feature about this was the fact that the English of practically every author selected was too turgid, the movement too slow for broadcasting. So I found myself in the odd position of having to improve the English of men whose genius I greatly admired.

The worst offenders by far were Harrison Ainsworth and R. D. Blackmore. I found that Scott, George Eliot, Louisa M. Alcott, Dumas, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, Marryat, Fenimore Cooper, Dickens, Boldrewood, Kingsley, Reade, Hans Andersen, Grimm and Conan Doyle all needed drastic sub-editing.

The only authors whose English needed scarcely any trimming were Lewis Carroll, R. L. Stevenson, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, John Buchan, Swift, Mark Twain, Bunyan, Defoe, Erich Kästner and Arthur Ransome.

The forty talks I gave were on *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Heroes*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Treasure Island*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Peter Simple*, *The Cloister on the Hearth*, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, *Rewards and Fairies*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *An Inland Voyage*, *Travels With a Donkey*, *Tom Sawyer*, *David Copperfield*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Westward Ho!*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Day's Work*, *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, *Arabian Nights*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Ivanhoe*, *Kidnapped*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Kim*, *Little Women*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Coral Island*, *Lorna Doone*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Emil and the Detectives*, *The Tower of London*, *Swallows and Amazons*, *Prester John*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Water-Babies*, *Robbery under Arms*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, the short stories of H. G. Wells, and the fairy tales of Grimm and Hans Andersen.

I think this is a fairly representative list of the books that boys and girls in Elementary Schools up to the age of thirteen find enjoyable, not by any means all to the same degree.

I felt guilty for omitting *Black Beauty*, *Swiss Family Robinson* and the stories of E. Nesbit.

The most popular book with nearly all girls and most boys is *The Wind in the Willows*. It is to the young of to-day what "Alice" presumably was to the youngsters of the 'seventies.

I found that all children liked *Treasure Island*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and *Tom and the Detectives*, and that girls have a weakness for *Little Women*. To the rest they accorded a moderated approval.

By this time my post-bag had passed far beyond my capacity to cope with it in person. My secretary did his best, but I must have offended many who would have been my friends by my seeming off-handed manner in not replying to their letters for a year, if at all.

This did not so much matter when my correspondents were only at pains to point out my many errors and faults; but I found that I was expected to be a sort of travel information bureau, and indeed I tried to reply to questions about places and costs even when the courtesy of a stamped-addressed envelope was not forthcoming.

But my main business was to answer the children. The climax was reached, I think, when I found myself selected among the Twelve Winning Aces selected in the £1000 competition instituted by the *Daily Express*.

The twelve winning radio aces were Mabel Constanduros, Christopher Stone, S. P. B. Mais, Reginald Foort, Henry Hall, Olive Groves, Gillie Potter, Leonard Henry, Ambrose's Band, Gracie Fields, A. J. Alan and the Commodore Orchestra.

I cannot think, whatever good things I may do in future, that I shall ever have so tremendous a tribute to my personality again. I even found my photograph included in the *Radio Pictorial* picture post-card selections of favourite radio stars.

My next series of talks was completely different from anything that I had ever contemplated or indeed thought possible for me. They came about in this way.

One evening as I was listening with only half an ear to E. M. Forster criticising the latest books I heard him, to my surprise, mention the book that I had made out of my talks on "This Unknown Island." "It is a pity," he said, "that this traveller appears to be quite ignorant of how one half of the nation lives. He makes no mention from first to last of the Unemployed. They might not exist in his 'Unknown Island.' I suggest that on his next trip he should visit the Unknown Tyne, Mersey and Clyde."

I stood rebuked. I felt extremely ashamed of myself, and the next day presented myself to Lionel Fielden, who was my immediate chief in the Talks Department, and asked him to send me round to have a look at the Unemployed.

"But you're the last man in the world to do that," he said. "It's a political business. We want you to go out with Gerald Heard and search for new industrial developments."

"No," I said. "It's my business. I'll either do that or nothing."

"Then," he said, quite rightly, "you'll do nothing." And out I walked, distressed and angry. I hated missing that series of industrial developments, but I felt too strongly to cave in.

To my surprise I was sent for many months later, and told that I had been selected for this very delicate business of bringing home to the listening public the problem of the unemployed. I was also warned that the B.B.C. had only given in to my request with great misgiving, and that before I embarked upon this dangerous mission I must sound all the high officials of the National Council of Social Service, British Institute for Adult Education, Society of Friends, W.E.A. and Ministry of Labour to see just what I was going to be allowed to do. This threw me into the society of men of whom I had never heard and who certainly had never heard of me.

The National Unemployed Workers' Movement sent a deputation to the B.B.C. demanding that I should not

be sent on this mission. Unemployment apparently was their job.

My series was given a tremendous send off by the Duke of Windsor who had always cared tremendously about this problem. The Director of Talks announced the object of the series, which was to be called "S.O.S." thus :

"It is not concerned with the relief of poverty : its purpose is to expose the riches and character and skill of the unemployed, and the part which every wise community can play in releasing it."

I started out in appalling weather in January, 1933, exactly as I had started out in the snow of January, 1932, on my "Unknown Island" series. But this time I was not looking for beauty. I was looking for ugliness, and found it in plenty. I started in Tyneside and my first view of a large disused church being used as a rest-room for 1500 unemployed Tynesiders struck terror into my heart.

The men looked quite dead. If I pricked them I felt they would not bleed. They were not resentful. They were apathetic to a point of stupor. They all looked stunned. It seemed to me quite unbelievable that the nation, if they once saw this, could permit it to go on. It is four years since I stood in that Newcastle hall and there has been a great deal of talk, but there are still 94,000 unemployed on Merseyside alone, and God knows how many on the Tyne.

I was certainly not less anxious to tell what I now saw than I had been the year before. But it was a time when all the unemployed had influenza, and they communicated it to me generously, three times in four weeks, so that I appeared each week before the microphone feeling more dead than alive.

My most gruesome experience was on the Clyde where I walked about the burning slag-heaps on a night of terrible frost, picking my way among men one side of whose bodies was being scorched by hot cinders while the other was being frost-bitten.

As a picture of our Unknown Island in 1933 it doesn't

bear thinking about for long. It was an easy business to arouse indignation and sympathy. I had only to relate in the baldest language what I saw. Money began to pour in. I began to send it back. I wasn't asking for money. I was asking people to go and see for themselves, and then make up their minds what they proposed to do about it. But money kept on coming in.

Here is a letter I treasure beyond almost any that I ever received.

“ 31 *March*, 1933.

“ DEAR MR. MAIS,

“ Thank you for all you are doing for the unemployed. I am enclosing a cheque for £2000 to be used for the benefit of the unemployed at your sole discretion. I of course wish this to be an absolutely private gift, so that if you keep any list of names of people who send money to be used for the unemployed will you please put this gift down as anonymous? ”

I don't think that I had ever seen a cheque for £2000 before. I did not know then that this was the whole of a young man's patrimony.

I was sent stamps by the very poor. My house became a museum of fishing-rods, false teeth, billiard tables, cornets, fretsaws, gramophones, golf clubs, clothes and food.

I was offered houses, bungalows and barns and the personal services of a midwife, chiropodist, dancing mistress, policeman, typist, chartered accountant and fish-net maker.

I soon discovered what I wanted. I thought nothing of the rest-rooms and recreational clubs, but I saw unlimited possibilities in the Occupational Clubs that were springing up all over the place. I concentrated almost wholly on these.

Their virtues were that they restored the unemployed man's self-respect by making him pay his way, and providing him with materials with which to busy himself for his own advantage. He could not, by law, sell anything that he had made, but he could and did repair his

own boots, his furniture and his clothes. He could learn new handicrafts, he could utilise his leisure to his own advantage and to that of the community.

In Lincoln the unemployed were running their own nursery school, in Brynmawr they had turned a slag heap into a public park and built a swimming-pool, in Hebburn they had converted an old power-station into a magnificent community-hall for dances, plays, whist drives and meetings.

Instead of standing listlessly at the street-corners men now found a fresh object in life. The difficulty about these clubs was that the men at first regarded them with suspicion as a plot on the part of the Government to train them into being half-skilled carpenters, or boot-repairers, and then turn them out to undercut the prices of the fully trained men. It took a long time to restore the men's confidence either in themselves or in anybody else.

My post now became doubly difficult, in accepting help and placing it, and in doing anything to relieve the distress of those who wrote for help. I had £3000 in cash sent to me, and used nearly all of it in helping these Occupational Clubs to stand on their own feet and in founding, at King's Standing, a big country house near Burton-on-Trent, a sort of staff college where the secretaries of clubs could go and have a refresher course.

One of the pressing problems of Occupational Clubs after their foundation was to find an ever fresh variety of interests going. There arose too in my mind the quite different problems of the wives of the unemployed, unemployed women, black-coated workers—who took their unemployment as a personal disgrace and a sign of incompetence—young boys and girls just leaving school, the old, and farm-labourers, who in those days received no benefit.

I tried to find out how far allotments were any solution to the trouble, and discovered that whereas in certain places, Sheffield and Ipswich, for instance, they were popular, in other places the unemployed could not be brought to see any virtue in them at all.

The allotment scheme was better run than any other because it was in the control of the Society of Friends. It was my first active contact with Quakers, and everywhere I found them head and shoulders above any other body in economic efficiency, common sense and vision. I met Elizabeth Fry in The Friend's House in Euston Road, then I met Peter Scott in South Wales, busy on his Subsistence Production scheme, by which a body of unemployed men could start a community able to exist more or less on its own productions, paying more in work than money for its necessities. The idea of a man going into a store and demanding five minutes' worth of Woodbines or an hour and a half's worth of ribs of beef struck me as an eminently useful contribution to the unemployed man's problem. I then met the Wills family in Bristol and secured from their employees a donation of £50 a week, I saw the great work done by the Cadburys at Bournville, and I met Wilfred Lunn fighting a desperate battle in West Cumberland. I met the Rowntrees in York and William Noble of Maes-yr-Haf, but I regret intensely having missed the sculptor Donnethorne who has kept Dowlais alive through the worst years in its history. The giants were all among the Quakers, but in George McLeod, the King's Chaplain, and minister at Govan, I met a saint. In Lady Headlam, Lady Reading and the Hon. Mrs. Bower I met three indefatigable women.

The trouble with these talks was exactly the same as the trouble with the "Unknown Island" talks. I had no sooner started than I had to leave off, and I had no time even to get down to the vexed question of why there is a shortage of domestic servants in spite of unemployment. For three months I was feeling my way, and just beginning to say something pertinent when the series closed down.

By a singular stroke of ill-luck I could not even devote my whole time each week to the unemployed. I had also to give a Saturday morning talk for twelve consecutive Saturdays on "The Londoner's Week-End" on London Regional, which again reduced me to a five-day week so far as unemployment was concerned.

In "The Londoner's Week-End" I gave talks on the Tower, the National Gallery, the British Museum, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, the London Museum, the South Kensington Museum, the South Downs, the Forests of Sussex, Inkpen Beacon, and Meopham. This series would have been more fun if I had not been obsessed by unemployment and defeated by influenza.

My reward for the Unemployment talks was great. It brought me this letter from Charles Siepmann, who had succeeded Hilda Matheson as Director of Talks :

" 7 April, 1933.

" MY DEAR MAIS,

" You have had a lot of bother and some criticism during these last twelve weeks, but I know that it has been far outweighed with you by the sense of achievement and the extent of the appreciation that has come to you in letters.

" Now that it is all over we want very much to add to that our own official thanks for the superb enthusiasm and sincerity with which you put those talks across. I am afraid this institution speaks to you mostly in terms of contracts and official forms, and it is pleasant to be able to write you a letter that carries from me personally, as well as from the Corporation, messages of genuine appreciation and admiration for what you have done. It has been a real achievement and you have helped us to make broadcasting more like what we would have it be than it was before you started. Thank you a thousand times. We think of you very gratefully.

" Yours sincerely,

" C. A. SIEPMANN."

On the strength of that I thought that there would be a follow-up, a sequel, of some sort. In any event I was too deeply embroiled in the problem to get out. I went on visiting the distressed areas, addressing meetings, holding debates in the Cambridge University Union and

discussions on public platforms, meeting with an uproar at Barrow, another at Stockport ("I'm going out to commit an act of 'voilence.' Then when I come out I shall get my green ticket and a job"), and another at Poole from a prominent member of the N.U.W.M., who had been to prison for the cause. When I next met him he had lost his militant spirit. He had joined the Oxford Group.

"In a God-guided world," he wrote to me, "we should have no unemployed." When he first met me he wanted to shoot me. Now he wanted to convert me. I preferred him in his Communistic vein.

I met David Raikes, the originator of the '33 Clubs which aimed at selling to members food and necessities at cut prices. He had stroked the Oxford Eight and was a man of energy and vision. He induced me to put £2000 into King's Standing, of which he was for a time Director.

I offered myself to the National Council of Social Service, and was about to throw myself more wholeheartedly than ever into this business of Unemployment when another bolt fell from the blue.

Instead of suggesting a second series of "This Unknown Island" or a continuation of the "S.O.S." talks the B.B.C. now proposed to send me out to the United States.

"But," I objected, "I know nothing about America."

"You knew nothing about unemployment. To know nothing of your subject is your greatest asset."

"But," I continued, "the unemployed cannot get on without me." I was as swollen-headed as that.

"They'll still be here when you get back."

I went off to discuss the situation with Captain Ellis, secretary of the National Council. In his company I saw Sir John Reith.

"It's for you to decide," said Sir John. "And we won't hold it against you if you decide against America, but I won't hide from you the fact that we think the work you will be doing in cementing a good relationship between America and England is more important than

anything you can do in the same time with or about the unemployed."

"You suggest," I said, "that I am a fit and proper person to be England's Ambassador to the American people?"

"I do," said Sir John.

"In spite of the fact that I am ignorant of America, that I am insular, that I dislike the Americans I know and the fact that I do not want to go."

"In spite of all that," he said.

So I went, but very much against my will. I put up every objection I could think of. I raised the proposed fee to a figure which didn't pay me, but certainly made me unpopular with the B.B.C.

I left England a very proud man. As a result of my Unemployment talks I had letters from Sandringham expressing Queen Mary's interest. I had an audience of half an hour with the Duke of Windsor at St. James's Palace.

The B.B.C. gave me £400 for the American talks and a further £200 for my expenses. I ought to have been able to save on that, but I was totally unprepared for the costliness of American hotels and travel.

I spent the summer of 1933 quietly by the sea preparing for the great ordeal. I got some idea of American methods from William Hard, a Washington journalist. When the scheme of my travel was mooted to him he drew out an envelope from his pocket, sketched in less than a minute a map of the United States and jabbed in twelve halting-places for broadcasting without a moment's hesitation.

I followed that route for 24,000 miles without question, and he was wrong in a most important particular. He forgot to take into account that I was journeying from September to January, and he sent me to the south (hot country) first, and the north and east (cold country) last. That was typical of him.

I had luncheon with Judge Bingham, the United States Ambassador, and he taught me how to eat corn

on the cob. I caught some of the childlike enthusiasm of the Americans from Fred Bate, the National Broadcasting Corporation's representative in England, who lived very handsomely in Lord Apsley's house in Buckingham Gate.

I was quite genuinely terrified at the size of the job I had taken on. I was no traveller. I was afraid of the English Channel. I had nightmares about the Atlantic Ocean. I was undertaking it solely because it had been borne in upon me that I alone could put over the impression of the man in the street in one country to the man in the street in another. I was not helped by interviews given me by Admiral Carpendale and Colonel Dawnay in the B.B.C., who gave me to understand that the Foreign Office would follow my journey with the greatest interest, and that I must be most careful what I say. "The Americans are most sensitive to criticism," I was told.

"But surely I've got to say what I feel. If not, you must get somebody else. I can't hide my feelings, nor do I care to."

I set out in the *Berengaria*, and to my surprise, in spite of rough weather, I was never sick. I didn't sleep the whole way out or home, but I was never sick. I always imagined that I was going to be, and the only time I felt completely at ease was during meals and dancing.

I sat at the staff captain's table and met Captain Edgar Britten, a most simple-minded, lovable, brusque North Countryman. Leslie Banks and a few other cinema stars were on board. The passengers were mainly American. I felt very lonely and insignificant in mid-Atlantic, but I was considerably cheered by the arrival of a radio-telegram which ran :

"Columbus was met by Indians stop We will try to make our greetings more enthusiastic and cordial stop Everybody anxious make your stay happy stop Our Representatives will meet you quarantine stop

"ROYAL NATBROADCAST."

The first sight of the tall sky-scrapers of Manhattan shining like golden towers above a wreath of pearl-grey

mist in the early hours of a September morning remains with me as one of the loveliest of earthly visions.

As we drew up into the Hudson River we were greeted by a host of giant butterflies and a less happy host of importunate photographers. I was really made to feel by these photographers that I was a person of importance. I didn't realise that they photographed, with extreme recklessness of cost, all visiting Englishmen.

It seemed typical to me that we should be heralded with a brass band and deafening cheers at the Quay. But they were not for me. They were for Barbusse who had not appeared on deck or in public once the whole way over.

New York City almost stunned me with its electrifying vitality. I had never seen people move so quickly, smile so easily, or look so little care-worn. The girls were all incredibly lovely, the men smart, the shops magnificent. I lost my heart on landing, and I never got it back. I lost not only my heart, but my bearings. I spent an astonishing amount of money, and I had no idea at all how to set about my business of broadcasting.

I expected the whole thing to be cut and dried, and everything prepared for me. For some reason I imagined that I was the most important broadcasting personage in the States. I had entirely forgotten that broadcasting in America is an advertising concern, and that my weekly twenty minutes was only part of the "sustaining" and therefore unimportant programme.

It was with some difficulty that I even found anybody in the National Broadcasting Corporation willing to assume any responsibility for me. Everybody tried to push me on to somebody else.

I met the president, Aylesworth, who surprised me a good deal by talking with a certain awe of an English Member of Parliament whom he had just interviewed. He seemed to think less of me for thinking little of Mr. G. D.—, M.P. He delivered me into the hands of the vice-president, John Royal, who was more helpful. Indeed I owe the whole of my American trip really to his interest on my behalf.

He quickly realised that I should be able to get nowhere by myself, so he appointed his Director of Talks, Margaret Cuthbert, to accompany me on my fifteen-thousand-mile tour, to fix up all the hotel accommodation and broadcasting arrangements, and leave me free to collect material and to give my talks.

After being photographed once more on the top of the swaying Radio City Building, 840 feet above Fifth Avenue, in the company of a praying mantis, and being taken by John Royal to see the first night of *As Thousands Cheer*, I set out on my long journey, the most exhausting I have ever undertaken in my life.

My talks on "The Unknown Island" and Unemployment had been a fairly exacting business, but they were nothing to this. I now had to travel a thousand miles a week, sum up the differentia of a whole new foreign State, translate those differentia interestingly over the air to an audience never less than three thousand and at times over seven thousand miles away, who didn't want to hear about America anyway, and were practically unable to hear anything owing to faulty transmission.

There was an occasion when the control-room on the English side didn't even tune in on the right wavelength.

In my first week I had to give a summary of Virginia and Kentucky, and in my endeavour to get the right initial atmosphere I hired a car at a cost of £29 to drive me in one day to James Town, Virginia and back, from Washington.

It nearly cost me my life. The driver going at seventy miles an hour happened to go off the kerb, and in his efforts to straighten out we zig-zagged violently across the road, and missed two telegraph posts by inches. Miraculously we came out of it intact. "I may not be the best driver in the world," said the chauffeur, "but I'm certainly not the worst."

I visited the college of Berea in the Kentucky Mountains where the sons and daughters of the vendetta-loving hill-billies are trained, and after talking to them for an hour I asked them if they wanted to ask or say anything.

"Just one thing, Mr. Britisher," they shouted almost in unison.

"And what's that?"

"You can't speak English. You're 'cissy.'"

I asked for an illustration.

"You keep on saying 'blue' for blow, and 'gue' for go."

"Nonsense," I said. "You say it." And when they said it I saw how effeminate our brand of English is in comparison with theirs.

I expected a very up-to-date broadcasting station from which to give my talks. I found that I was expected to give my first talk from Lexington, Kentucky, where there was no broadcast station at all. I had to give my talk from my hotel bedroom into an improvised machine, and it was so overbearingly hot that I had to keep the windows open, with the result that my voice was practically drowned by the noise of the railway engines just below. I was particularly annoyed because it was my first talk, and I had had the great good luck to meet President Roosevelt, and I wanted to tell England of the impression he had made on me.

My second talk was from Jacksonville, Florida, after a five-hundred-mile drive out of my way to see the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky, a thousand-mile train run through Georgia, and an adventure with an alligator in the jungle.

It was my first experience of really tropical flowers, of hibiscus and oleander and Spanish moss, and heat and jungle animals, and I was beginning to enjoy myself prodigiously in spite of the intermittent fears that my guides had about being held up by hitch-hikers. From Jacksonville I went by slow train along the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans where I found myself staying in the same hotel as Huey Long, whose least unpleasant feature was his table manners. They were worse than any I had ever before encountered.

I ate Creole dishes, was fascinated by Creole faces, journeyed to Avery Island to meet the Tabasco King, Mr. McIlhinney, saw my first game of American football,

and listened to my first negro spirituals performed in a church. I also saw the sugar and cotton plantations.

My next trek was across the prairie of Texas, arriving in glorious tropical heat at San Antonio to see the great airport of Randolph Field, careering over the border into Mexico at El Paso for an hour, and then following the Rio Grande by motor bus through New Mexico to Santa Fé, where it was snowing. I had not only to broadcast from my hotel bedroom at Santa Fé, but to accommodate in it an excitable Mexican tango band. I threatened to murder them if they so much as coughed while I talked.

I then met the Red Indians of Taos, and found myself completely tongue-tied by the majesty of the Grand Canyon before going down to Phoenix, Arizona, to meet the giant cactus and many rattlesnakes.

I then broadcast from San Francisco on my adventures in Hollywood. It was here that I made one of those astonishing slips of the tongue that overtake one periodically for no accountable reason. Instead of saying: "Immediately after leaving you last week," I said: "Immediately after leaving you next week." It worried me for the whole of the next week.

While I was in California I ran into my first lynching. It was more unpleasant than the stock-markets of Chicago. I talked about the lumber-camps and dairy-farms of the north-west frontier from Seattle, and then travelled over the Rockies on the footplate of the engine to get back to Minneapolis where Margaret Cuthbert was replaced by Judith Waller of the Chicago Station.

In my tiredness and perplexity and anxiety to get my story right I had given Margaret Cuthbert a terrible gruelling. I was always grouching about something, the absence of iced water or the presence of dust, or my refusal to have anybody in the studio with me. I was savagely rude to interviewers, because they all asked the same questions. None of them knew who I was or what I was doing. One of them revenged himself for my seeing him in bed by saying that I had been reduced to this extremity by too much Californian sun.

I had also brusquely to refuse all invitations, although in Minneapolis I did accept an invitation to a Thanksgiving dinner, and I heard in the Plymouth church there one of the finest sermons I have ever listened to.

I fell in love with Chicago from the moment of my arrival, partly for its beauty, and partly for its devotion to art. I was in Chicago for the repeal of Prohibition, and was staggered at the quietness with which the occasion was celebrated. There was no drunkenness at all. I was not, to my surprise, shot at by anyone in Chicago, but I was, equally to my surprise, shot at through the carriage window as I was whiling away a snowy night playing chess in Canada on my way to Buffalo.

I saw Henry Ford's works at Detroit, and visited Niagara at 40 degrees below zero. I then went ski-running down the Mohawk trail at Schenectady and met a number of Nobel Prize winners. Thence I went to Boston to visit the gentle lovely villages of Salem and Concord and got back to New York to celebrate Christmas and the New Year and give a final broadcast from the National Broadcast Company's own studios.

After my last talk I blushed to hear the announcer say : " We wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Mais for his vivid portrayal of the American scene, and express our appreciation to the B.B.C. for sending us an observer so penetrating and at the same time so sympathetic. Many of his American listeners have assured us that Mr. Mais has given them a new insight into the life of their own country."

Lest I should be too puffed up I received this anonymous counterblast from one of my own countrymen : " These American talks have taught me that I do not really care a brass farthing what Arizona looks like." And since I have come home I have received many corroborations of this point of view in my many lectures on America.

I now know enough of the United States to want to go back and back again to see more of a most fascinating country and to get to know better a most lovable and

childlike people. I shall not lightly forget the quality of the announcers' voices. They were all young, all good-looking, all newly married, all well off, and they all put themselves entirely at my service.

When I got back to New York after my tour, I again saw John Royal, and I remember saying in answer to his question, "What have you learnt?" "I have learnt," I said, "that no American is over twelve years old."

He laughed and said: "Your talks have so delighted us that I am prepared to give you whatever you may ask even up to the half of my kingdom."

"The only thing I want," I said, "is a thing that is beyond your power to give. The night I landed you took me to the first night of *As Thousands Cheer*. I know that seats are not to be bought. I should like two seats for to-night."

"Two people shall be shot," he said. "The seats are yours."

And they were.

I was away from England for four months, and after a rough passage home on the *Majestic* was entertained on my arrival in London to luncheon by the English-Speaking Union, an unexpected but very pleasant honour.

Wherever I went in the United States I found the High Schools in a state of intense excitement about our system of radio. Apparently the high spot of all debates that year was that on the relative merits of our system and theirs.

At St. Paul I heard two young Cambridge graduates debating the matter with the debaters of the St. Thomas' College. The English debaters erred on the side of flippancy and concentrated on the usual gag of making advertising on the air sound ridiculous.

The American debaters erred on the side of a too funereal solemnity, and spent their time asserting and reasserting that the B.B.C. is a Government department.

Even in one of the most reputable New York papers I read that in England radio is Government owned and operated.

The American people do not, and I think naturally, look with any favour on the substitution of a 2.50 dollar tax for no tax at all, in order to keep the advertiser out. The truth is that you soon get so used to the advertiser that you don't notice him.

The only time that I found him really troublesome was in Seattle while listening-in to a wildly exciting wrestling match which was being continually broken into by the narrator saying: "What d'ye say, Frank?" a cue for Frank to repeat once again with damnable iteration how necessary for our continued existence was somebody's coke.

From 7.15 in the morning until midnight or later the day is split up into exact quarter-hour periods. And I must confess that most of those periods, each taken by a different advertiser, exactly suited me, for most of them put on a dance band—Paul Whiteman, Duke Ellington, Wayne King, Cab Calloway or someone of that sort.

And I can always work to the music of a dance band and to nothing else.

I realise that that makes it sound as if America had far less variety on her radio than we have.

But it is worth remembering that in America there are hundreds of stations to choose from, and I always turned from one to the other in search of a whole day of dance music when I was preparing my broadcast talks.

On the same analogy anyone who wanted a day of nothing but talks could, I imagine, get it by simply pressing the button. I particularly liked the hill-billy and cowboy music.

But had I wanted them I could have listened to Catholic priests advising Roosevelt what to do with the dollar, Lowell Thomas talking on Arabia, Commander Byrd on his Polar expedition, or Amos 'n' Andy doing their daily coloured man's cross-talk story of pathos and laughter; could have followed the adventures of the Happy Family, a most ingenious device by which the humorous and dramatic life of one large family was revealed, I could have listened to Dr. Damrosch teaching children how to appreciate music, or followed the

instructions of the gymnasium instructor who gives the United States citizens their morning physical training.

Those who complain that the American system does not provide sufficient classical music forget that all the operas performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company are put on the air through the good offices of some famous advertisers.

The National Association of Broadcasters in America recently published a pamphlet, the purport of which was to help debaters with their facts.

In this debaters were told that we, on this side, restrict the discussion of public questions, neglect public events, devote too much time to purely cultural subjects and neglect the social and political sides of life.

It is difficult to see the justice of the contention that we restrict the discussion of public questions in view of the freedom given to speakers to discuss highly controversial subjects such as unemployment, disarmament and blood-sports.

During my own series of talks on unemployment I said exactly what I meant to say and never had one word censored.

Certainly I think America is luckier in not having her programmes fixed months ahead.

It was very pleasant to find that I could go on the air at about a day's notice, and the President, of course, can take control of the air whenever he chooses, which is pretty often.

It is certainly true that the United States is far more interested in international affairs than we are. This may be due to the fact that listeners-in come from all nations and that a fair allowance of time must be allotted to Irish, French, Russian, German, Italian and Czecho-Slovakian affairs.

I certainly think that we do accentuate the more purely cultural attitude to life, and I am very glad. I was rather surprised in America, in view of their great interest in literature and the drama, not to hear more critical talks. I heard one on Galsworthy in Chicago by a professor, which was well informed but heavy.

The American audience is much more heterogeneous than ours ; it spreads over three million square miles—that is, over an area more than thirty-two times the size of the British Isles.

There are six hundred stations, nearly four hundred of which are all working at the same time. There are perhaps 17,000,000 receiving sets. It is obvious that home interests must be served before you can hope to make room for the cultural.

The great mass of people much prefer entertainment to information. This means that an immense amount of world-news is rattled off at an almost incredible rate to squeeze it into a quarter-hour bulletin, and then the public is free to laugh its sides off for several hours.

For laughter is the main aim of advertisers, and amusement one of the main pursuits of the American people.

I found little to laugh at in the wisecracks of Eddie Cantor, Ed Wyn or even Will Rogers, but I certainly liked the slickness of Hal Hemp, Vincent Lopez and the rest of the band leaders.

Most of all I did like the deep, clear, really masculine human voices of the announcers, Phil Baker and his confederates, even though they are associated in my mind with patent medicines, the very mention of which gives me the headache they set out to dispel.

There is, of course, a lot of ballyhoo connected with advertising on the air but that is only comparable to the cheap-jack trying to induce the milkman at the fair to try his quack medicines or buy trinkets for his Phyllida.

I am quite sure that the advertiser on the air is coming to realise that buyers of goods are more generally to be found among the full-witted than the half-witted, and therefore employs the good entertainer rather than the vulgar.

It is of the very essence of our system that the listener should be given what authority thinks is good for him rather than what he likes instinctively.

Before I went to America I should have shuddered at the idea of advertising on the air.

I now realise that advertising on the air need be no more "offensive" than advertising in the Press.

It is solely a matter of presentation. There are many forms of advertisement that are a delight to the eye (railway posters, for example) and many that definitely add to the gaiety of the nation.

There are certain advertising columns that I find infinitely more entertaining and enlightening than the editorial columns of the same periodical.

Whenever I select a book for my talks to schools, I naturally advertise it, just as when I talk about a place that I like, I am obviously advertising it.

The fact that I am not paid does not alter the fact that it is advertising, and no amount of payment would make me say that I think *Pickwick Papers* is funny, Peacehaven beautiful, or Seaford gay.

The competition engendered by letting the air to advertisers is very healthy. The advertiser's first aim is to get the largest number of people to listen to his programme.

If he spends his air-time in repeating the virtues of the commodity he has to sell, he will be switched off at once.

If he has the wisdom to provide a first-rate entertainment his name and goods will always be associated with that entertainment.

Pepsodent is popular in the United States because everyone associates that commodity with the best two cross-talk comedians in America, Amos 'n' Andy.

Advertising on the air is good for the artistes, because it means that they will be paid according to their merit, and a public favourite will be able to command a far higher salary than he will ever get from the B.B.C.

Advertising on the air is good for the public, because they can demand far more ambitious and far more varied programmes than they get under a monopoly, however good.

It is not true to say that advertisers always pander to the lowest taste.

It is just nonsense to suggest that our sensibilities are so delicate that the bare mention of Ballito silk stockings

ruins the charm of the music provided by the advertisers of these delectable and airy nothings. It is equally nonsense to suggest that Gracie Fields is less likely to captivate us if her name were allied in our mind with "Energy" oats, or that Jack Hulbert's art would suffer from being associated with "Black's" fountain pens. So far as I am concerned, I should be only too delighted to have my name connected with, say, Barclay's Bank.

I have never imagined that art suffered by being paid for adequately. Indeed, the price paid by advertisers invariably makes me work much harder to please them and give them their money's worth.

The only thing at all that I regretted about advertising on radio in America was the fatuity of certain small stations in selling time to advertisers who didn't know how to use it.

Luxembourg announcers have yet to learn the technique of broadcasting. Their laughter is too forced and too frequent, their heartiness is too forced and too frequent. They protest far too much about the sterling qualities of their tomato juice and gripe water or whatever it is that they are trying to sell. They are like the small stations in America. They have not studied the psychology of the listeners.

For my part I should welcome advertising on the air for a reason that I have never seen advanced.

For practically every and all day of every and all months in the year, I am far too busy to poke my nose into shop windows.

But there are certain things that I need, and I always want the best in their kind—flannel trousers, watches, field-glasses, wine, shoes, socks, underclothes, ink, fountain pens, writing paper, shaving soap, razor, and tooth powder, new varieties of food, maps, books, holiday hints, notebooks, barometers, cameras, filing cabinets, cricket bats, tennis racquets, easy chairs, etchings, china, glass, furniture, bicycles and cars.

Really I think this almost exhausts my needs.

Now how am I to find them quickly when I want them? To leave my work and give up a day to going

round the shops is more than I can afford. I certainly turn over the advertisement pages of *Blackwood*, the *Countryman*, and the *New Yorker*, just as I turn to the advertisement pages of *Country Life* when I want a new house. But how infinitely easier to be reminded of the excellence of what is obviously the best sort of bicycle by a particular turn on the radio.

If the Hercules bicycle people were to hire Geraldo I am convinced that its merits would be more widely appreciated. I should certainly confine myself to the whisky producers who had the good sense to corner Gillie Potter.

And I am quite sure that any filing cabinet that I associated with "Les Girls" or the Eight Step Sisters would be the right system of filing for me.

I cannot think that either Commander Stephen King-Hall or the Ordnance Survey Department would feel a sense of lowered dignity by collaboration, and then King-Hall's talks would be always associated in listeners' minds with those lovely maps which we pore over with so much delight.

As I always like listening to King-Hall's voice and am most anxious to keep my library of maps up to date, that particular conjunction would afford me peculiar pleasure.

And what better time to be reminded of cricket bats than during an eye-witness account of a Test Match by Howard Marshall?

Any flannel trousers, shoes, socks, associated with the immaculate Mr. Eric Maschwitz would be definitely on my list, and any furniture, glass or china linked with that man of impeccable taste, A. J. Alan, would be good enough for me, while an easy chair that would make Teddy Brown comfortable would be sufficient for my needs.

Think how much unsuspected genius is lying fallow for want of a tooth powder or shaving soap to bring it to the front. But it wasn't only their radio system that I approved in America. The country had altogether intoxicated me. Indeed, I had, in the eyes of the B.B.C., overdone my eulogy.

I had cost them a great deal of money. I had proved nothing beyond the fact that the Englishman isn't interested in America to the extent of listening-in when atmospherics are bad.

My next series of talks was on the Outer Hebrides, Inner Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, Isle of Man, Isles of Scilly and the Channel Islands, and was chiefly remarkable for my flight (my first) to Orkney and back. It made me want to fly every day.

These island trips were most enjoyable because I was able to do them in the early summer. It was a glorious change after the snow and wind and rain that accompanied me on my "Unknown Island" tour.

I began, in May, in the Channel Islands, to which I ought to have flown. Air services are not very time-saving on land in so small an island as ours, but they are great time-savers over the sea.

I irritated the islanders of Jersey by commenting on their giant cabbages and potato crops. I liked Guernsey a good deal better, and Sark easily best, but I felt no temptation to return. Jersey is the paradise of the tripper. On the other hand, I found the Isles of Scilly completely fascinating by reason of their quietness, colour, sense of remoteness and absence of crowds.

I had a very rough crossing to the Isle of Man, and spent most of my time there in investigating the interesting Scandinavian carvings in St. Maughold Church.

The rest of the tour was spent in the islands off Scotland. I broadcast my impressions of the Isle of Man from Manchester and my impressions of the Hebrides from Edinburgh. I heard faery music for the only time in my life in Harris, but Hilda Matheson, herself a Hebridean and a sensitive critic, did not approve of my talk.

"The secrets of the Outer Hebrides do not yield themselves readily to strangers with a hearty southern manner and only a few minutes to spare. It was scarcely fair to try to effect a breezy introduction in an atmosphere and under conditions which could not make for success. For all Mr. Mais's gifts, he did not see and so could

not convey the qualities which make the Hebrides distinctive."

I certainly felt and sympathised with the Hebridean shyness and reserve, and their reluctance to show the Sassenach anything.

I found Orkney rich and very un-Hebridean, as indeed was Shetland, to which I went by sea. At Lerwick I tried to get a drink, and was told that the minimum I could buy at a time was a case of a dozen bottles of whisky. This "dry" town was the only place I met a drunken man during the whole of my tour. I came back with the shipwrecked crew of a trawler, as woebegone a sight as I can remember.

I appreciated the chance of visiting these islands even in a hurry. It was pleasant to discover the richness of Orkney, the quietude of the Isles of Scilly, the magic wildness of Lewis and the foreign far-awayness of Shetland, but the series lacked the wide appeal of the "Unknown Island" series. I was no longer reminding. I was informing about 90 per cent of my listeners. The *Nottingham Post* described the series as "brilliant," and congratulated me on not apologising for omissions.

I did another series for schools on the Fun of Writing, which started another generation of children sending me original compositions of varying merit. I then compered a revue and gave a five-minute outburst against litter-fiends. I have even been televised.

I was then asked to undertake several Sunday night Appeals. I got £1500 for the Institute of Medical Psychology, and £718 for the Royal Soldiers' Daughters Home. But because I dared to suggest that it was good for domestic servants in London to have a place where they could dance with their boy friends for a penny on Sundays I only got £150 for the Wayfarers' Association.

In 1935 I broadcast in Prague my opinion of Czechoslovakia and was paid, I think, enough to buy me a watch, £3 15s. I broadcast in Warsaw my opinion of Poland, and was rewarded by a double brandy which I badly needed. I broadcast in a debate across the Atlantic at 12.30 in the morning on the two brands of English,

and though it was heard perfectly in America my own dinner party failed to hear it in the listening-room below which I was talking.

In the same year I started broadcasting for Scott's Emulsion on the advertising station at Luxembourg. I recorded a series of twenty-six talks on Modern Heroes in a Hampstead studio and found that recording made me more nervous than straight broadcasting. So often the record has to be made over and over again to get the timing or speed right, and there is the added mischief of the possibility of making a slip.

Sometimes in preparing feature programmes for schools, on the work of the G.P.O. for instance, where we have to incorporate effects, we rehearse a ten-minute talk for four or five hours. Compression, fitting-in, and timing are great wearers-out of one's patience.

I remember when I was making a running commentary on the sound track in a film-recording studio of Carisbrooke Castle I repeated the same absurd mistake until it became almost a mania with me, and we had to stop for the day.

Running commentaries, like television, are difficult because you have to commit your words to memory in order that your eyes may follow what is taking place on the screen. And recording seems to remove one's contact with one's audience one degree further even than the microphone.

I was summoned by the B.B.C. quite lately to undergo an audition for outside commentator. Four of us were taken up to the roof of Broadcasting House on a murky drizzling day in January and told to tell the world over the air what we saw.

I saw dirt, red lights, roofs like the roofs of Manchester, a very small St. George's Hall, an exquisitely slender church spire, and the solidly Victorian Langham Hotel. What I said was recorded and played back to me. I didn't think much of it. A week or two later I received this letter from the B.B.C. :

"If I may say so, with respect, we thought your 'test' promising."

So someday I may even rise to the heights of becoming an outside commentator. But inside or outside it is the audience's response that matters, and when I am asked why I prefer radio audiences to any other here is my reply :

By far the best audience is the radio-audience. You, the listener. Why? Because you never distract me by coughing or shuffling your feet, and you are tremendous in numbers. Every speaker is at his best before a full house—and a silent one. I am abnormally sensitive to atmosphere. Late-comers, whisperers, early-leavers, and nose-blowers, have the power to make me lose completely the thread of my argument. You are ideal in that respect. For all I know you may be feeding noisily while I am talking. I can't hear you, and what the ear doesn't hear the heart doesn't grieve over. Even if you switch me off in contempt I go on talking as happily as if you were still listening. What is much stranger is the fact that I get a better sense of your appreciation through the microphone that I do on a platform. Your waves of sympathy and enthusiasm travel back to me just as fast as my words travel to you, and I can gauge much more easily in the studio what your reactions are to my talk than I ever can when I am confronting you in the flesh. Feeling waves of sympathy coming over the ether is a most eerie and delightful sensation. When I am on the platform your attention is diverted from my voice and my message to physical irrelevancies, the fact that my tie is slipping round the corner of my neck, that my front-studs are about to burst or have just done so, that my hair is not so dark as you like hair to be, that my mouth is crooked, that I am younger or older than you expected.

Like the cuckoo and the nightingale, and unlike the model Victorian child, I ought to be heard and not seen. Without my face I might make a fortune. Do not imagine that I am ogreish. I have, in my time, even been called handsome. Anybody's body distracts you in the flesh. That is the disadvantage of television.

To me, therefore, the microphone is a godsend. In a

moment of time you, a private, strongly individual, highly sensitive, shy, isolated, lonely you, a million shy, lonely isolated yous (as the Irish say) are brought into direct communion with me, without any distracting element whatever. You and I escape into a rarefied atmosphere where we can not only talk together in quietude, but also understand one another perfectly (I am presuming that your wireless set functions adequately). We are more than cut off from the rest of the world. We do not even have to overcome the initial self-consciousness and nervousness that would prevent our personalities from emerging true and clear on a first introduction in the flesh.

During a life spent almost wholly in speaking in public I have never descended from a platform or sat down after a speech without a sense of deep self-dissatisfaction.

"That is not what I meant at all," I whisper with Alfred J. Prufrock ; "that is not it at all."

There are many reasons for my failure to say what I mean before a visible audience. To read a speech is intolerable. But I have so wretched a memory and so complete a lack of logical or even coherent order that without notes I meander and scramble about haphazard, like a man who has lost his track over the mountains and cannot regain it. To read my speech I am ashamed. Even to refer to notes puts me off my stride. They destroy my flow, which is fairly facile. When I talk on a platform I must walk up and down, I must fling my arms about, I must act. I have to rely entirely on my brain's impulse. When I am talking to you I have every word written down in front of me, though it doesn't sound so to you. I do not have to think what I am going to say next. I can concentrate solely on convincing you.

Then, more often than not, all the energy has gone out of me before I begin a public lecture. There is the long and tiring railway journey, meeting hosts and chairmen, listening to reasons why the hall is not full. The weather is against me, "People won't leave home on a night like this"; there are counter-attractions; there

is an epidemic, "People are so afraid of infection"; there is always something.

Ultimately there is the audience. I can't say anything to these people. I listen to the chairman. He is declaiming grotesquely inaccurate things about me. I rise like a beaten puppy, all the spirit whipped out of me. I do my best. After fighting for an hour to rouse some enthusiasm I sink down exhausted.

Do not misunderstand me. I like lecturing. There is only one thing I like better, and that is talking to you over the microphone.

But not even an overcrowded hall is so exciting as the microphone, for the disembodied voice has a magic quality about it that makes you much more inclined to make a confidante of it than you would if you saw the face behind the voice. After my lectures I get applause, from girls' schools, warm, spontaneous, exhilarating applause. But after talking over the microphone there is something much better than fast-fading applause, there is a deluge of letters, the beginnings of friendships based on something far more permanent than physical contacts, and that is common enthusiasms.

You, shyest of the shy, loneliest of the lonely, pour yourselves out to me, because there is some chord in my voice which you recognize as akin to something in you.

You and I, perhaps, are not very good with people in the flesh. Our physical adventures have somehow not come off. El Dorado is as far away as ever, and companions on the voyage keep on failing us. But there are, we have just discovered, spiritual adventures, even more joyous and exciting, and we can undertake these together, you and I, you in your bubbling-over letters to me, and I in my bubbling-over talks to you.

It is all very strange, but amazingly satisfying.

I can at last say what I have been trying, in books and on the public platform, to say all my life, and you, on your part, not only catch what I am saying, but put fresh life into me by the warmth of your response.

Do I like you, my best of audiences? I should just say I do, even when I am defending fox-hunting.

Chapter XIV

TRAVELLING

(i) *At Home* ; (ii) *Europe* ; (iii) *U.S.A.*

“ I cannot rest from travel.
For ever roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known.
. . . My purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the paths
Of all the Western stars until I die.”

“ **T**RAVEL,” said Stella Benson, “ shrinks and fades the mind as an inferior laundry shrinks and fades the silks that are so bright and ample when we wear them first. People who want to keep their minds broad, flexible and bright, should stay at home—should, above all, keep clear of God’s Great Open Spaces.”

(i) *At Home*

My travelling has always been a child’s game. I travel exactly as a child travels, full of expectancy, in continual astonishment, counting on everybody to do everything for me, totally ignorant of what I have to pay, totally ignorant of the languages that are being spoken all round me, fearful of danger, grotesquely uncomfortable, but enjoying every moment of it.

“ Should you meet on your travels a fair, shortish, clean-shaven man who looks as hard as nails, has a coat slung over one arm and a mackintosh over the other, who has his pockets bulging and is in a frightful hurry, it is quite a shade of odds that it is S. P. B. Mais.

“ Ask him his business and he’ll probably tell you he has been sent to reconnoitre something or other by the B.B.C. because he knows nothing about it. He has a curious belief that he knows nothing about anything.”

This picture of an innocent abroad is taken from the *Radio Times*.

My nickname at school was "hungry trout," and I seem always to be wandering about the earth after the approved "rubber-neck" fashion, gaping with mouth open at every fresh sight. It is true about the coats and the bulging pockets and the hurry. The picture would be complete if you add a black leather note-book in which I endeavour, in spite of wind and rain, to jot down notes that are almost always indecipherable.

My earliest (remembered) journey was nearly my last. I escaped from a picnic party on Brecon Beacons at the age of five, was mistaken for a rabbit rustling through the heather, and picked up for dead by the boy whose aim with a bottle had been true enough to split my forehead. The scar is still more vivid than the memory. In my early childhood I was always travelling. We moved from Birmingham to Sittingbourne, thence to Keighley, thence to Knighton, thence to Tansley, all in my first five years. My father as a curate was kept on the move as much as the recruiting officer who was George Borrow's father. So I imbibed a taste for travel as soon as I was born. But after sampling Warwickshire, Kent, Yorkshire, Shropshire, and Derbyshire in five years, my father never moved again except for one brief excursion to Norway. I have two aunts who have only once left the fastness of North Devon, and on that occasion went straight to Jerusalem and back.

Journeyings in my extreme youth were mainly between Derbyshire and Devon, always an exciting voyage because I did it alone. On the only occasion when I was accompanied it was by an old lady from whom my mother had expectations. On sighting her I cried "I hate you," and refused to travel in the same carriage. It was an expensive journey for my mother, for she was cut out of the will.

There were dangerous journeys on the penny-farthing bicycle behind my father over the setts that led from Greetland to Halifax. There were joyous journeyings on ordinary push-bicycles with my father and mother all

over Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Cheshire. There was my escape from home at the age of ten or eleven over the lonely Baslow moors to Eyam, and my much more adventurous escapade, following in the steps of my hero, George Borrow, all through North Wales. At the age of thirteen I climbed Snowdon entirely alone in a snowstorm in February from Gorphwsfa, and cried with fright the whole way up and with relief the whole way down.

At Denstone I travelled little after the only occasion when I ran away (that was in a snowstorm, and I had a temperature of 102 degrees). I contented myself afterwards with robbing orchards.

When at eighteen, however, I dashed off after seeing Stephen Phillips' *Tristram and Iseult* to catch the midnight train from London to Cornwall to explore Tintagel, my travelling may be said to have seriously begun, for it meant pawning my watch to pay for my ticket.

Obviously I liked "going places." In view of all this I find it very difficult to understand why I spent no single holiday out of all the twenty years of my schoolmastering life travelling abroad. It is true that I had to take on tutoring jobs most of the time, but I must have spent months just lazing about at home when I might have been gaining invaluable experience and enjoying the thrill of Continental travel. I was always afraid of the sea after my first unforgettable voyage at the age of eleven from Barry to Milford Haven in a hurricane, and that fear led to other fears. I sent my ticket back when Sir Alfred Jones offered to take undergraduates out to Jamaica for a month for £5 inclusive of everything, I turned down the offer of a visit to Ceylon to report on the teaching of English, and the offer of the Begum of Oudh to tutor her son.

I seem to have missed quite half my opportunities. To-day I am ready at a moment's notice to fly anywhere and do anything. I suppose I owe that to my newspaper life. At any rate until I was out of my teens I had done nothing wilder than cross the borders of Scotland and Wales.

I believe my first sea voyage (after the Bristol Channel one) was from Holyhead to Dublin, when I was captain of the Oxford cross country team, and had to take my team over. I was so ill that I could scarcely get off the boat, but to comfort those who fear sea-sickness I should add that I never ran better in my life than I ran the next day. It was the last and best race of my life. Incidentally I have never been seasick since.

I started climbing mountains when I was an undergraduate, but I have never tackled the business of rock-climbing. I am merely a scrambler, and the only danger I have ever encountered was on the top of Braeriach where I collapsed, owing to a bad heart, with no one within twenty miles to come to my aid except a herd of deer who eyed me warily at a distance of twenty yards. When, however, on the downward journey hours afterward I lay down to regain my breath a golden eagle came between me and the sun, circled round and round and came actually to rest within five yards of me. Even in my fright (I thought it was a vulture) and in my exhaustion I managed to laugh. It looked so exactly like a turkey.

Peter Fleming goes to the ends of the earth, undergoing the most hideous privations, and running his neck into nooses from which there would appear to be no escape, and seems to find it all rather boring. I, who have never been anywhere or encountered anything more savage than an alligator or more dangerous than a rattlesnake, seem to myself to be always just snatched from the jaws of death. Anyway, I'm one up on Peter Fleming. He has not actually been dead. I have. But I have had my anxious moments in spite of my mild existence. There was the nail in my Christmas pudding in the Birmingham restaurant that had to be extracted from my throat. There was the Sherborne boy who took a cross-roads during army manœuvres at fifty miles an hour exactly at the same moment that a van came from the other way at the same rate. There was nothing left of the car or van, but several shaken human beings picked themselves gingerly out of hedges and indulged in

vehement rhetoric that betrayed surprise at being alive to use it. There was the Rossall boy who after a much too good Guest Night at Cranwell drove me at sixty miles an hour through a five-barred gate into a ploughed field. As it was he who afterwards drove the same car very fast in total ignorance of the fact that a wheel had come off he and I might be said at that time to be bearing charmed lives.

On two other occasions I have been given up for dead in a car, once in Virginia, once in Gloucestershire when I was hurrying to a lecture and the wheels jammed, and we danced merrily and very fast into and out of the lights of an even faster express motor-coach.

These are, I know, the accidents that befall every man, but they are the accidents of travel. He doesn't have to risk them if he stays at home. I only just escaped alive after being gassed in an hotel bedroom at Richmond, Yorkshire, just as I only just got out of the school laboratory alive at Denstone after messing about with carbon-monoxide. I was only missed by inches by the humorist who shot a bullet through the window-pane of my railway compartment near Buffalo.

After the 'Varsity sports of 1906 I went straight down to Devon and dived hard on to a submerged rock, which tore up my stomach and prevented me from running for two years.

I was waylaid late one night by gunmen while I was driving from Grantham to Sleaford, but they were, I think, nervous and in a hurry. I wasn't alone in having my hut burnt about my ears at Cranwell.

My peace-time exploits have, as I said, been pretty tame; as this, the most formidable list of dangers by flood and field that I can remember, testifies.

The nastiest experience of the lot was being lost as a small boy for seventeen hours in a Derbyshire lead-mine without any light. But then I had my father with me.

I am not an adventurous traveller, and if danger is needed to aid the gastric juices I prefer to have indigestion. I am all for safety. When I next climb Helvellyn I am not going to crawl for two hundred yards over an

overhanging ice edge as I did last time. The thought of falling two thousand feet made me sweat off nearly two thousand ounces in undiluted funk.

My travelling has not been in search of the hazardous, but of the curious and beautiful. I fell in love with Scotland the moment I first crossed the border, and always I have gone back to it with increasing enjoyment. On my first visit to it as an undergraduate I did nothing more exciting than climb Ben Lawers and get myself mistaken by a short-sighted botanist for a member of some strange society to which he belonged by wearing a vividly-coloured pyjama-jacket at breakfast. It was in Scotland that I first flew. The journey was from Aberdeen to Orkney, the pilot was freshly home from South America, so he wasn't bothering about a little thing like absence of all radio communications. Our cargo was the skull of a man who had been dead for two thousand years and a very much alive lobster who scuttled about all over the very confined space of the aeroplane. It was an enjoyable voyage because it made me realise the beauty of Aberdeen, the width of the Moray Firth, the flatness of Caithness and the roughness of the Pentland Firth. In Orkney I met the only shark of my acquaintance. As I was in a small rowing-boat I was not anxious to see it at closer quarters. I went to Shetland by sea, and remember about it mainly the mass of sea birds on the Loup of Noss so multitudinous that they looked like raindrops on the surface of the water. My Shetland host, a bachelor, had typed out a whole list of "Don'ts" in red ink, which made me wonder whether he really liked entertaining visitors. But he was a great deal more interesting than some of my hosts when I lecture. He wasn't "dry."

I found the people of the Hebrides shy, sensitive, imaginative and very intelligent. The boys run away as you approach, but I was shown over a "black house" in which the cattle occupy one half of the thatched one-storeyed stone hut and the family share the other two rooms. Beds are let into the walls, hand-loom and spinning-wheels occupy most of the space, and the peat

fire is in the centre of the floor, the smoke escaping (when it does) through a louvre in the thatch.

In Skye as I was trying to reach Coruisk I passed at Camosunary the cottage of a woman so shy that in spite of knockings and window-rappings for a quarter of an hour she would not show herself, and yet as soon as I had gone she reappeared at the window. This occurred both on my way out and home. She could not have failed to notice my fatigue, and there was no other human habitation for ten miles on any side.

In the village of Fortingall, which is reputed to be the birthplace of Pontius Pilate, I encountered another fact almost equally unexpected. The Yorkshireman who keeps the inn does all his own cooking, and as he learned his job in Paris it is as delectable as it is unexpected.

One of my happiest memories of Scotland is of a chemist who sat at my table in a café in Stirling and then accompanied me on my bus on the way to Gleneagles endeavouring all the time to teach me Gaelic.

I have memories of Compton Mackenzie, magnificently the Highlander, in full kilt marching me off from his island home on the Beaulieu river to church on Strath Glass.

I have memories of superb dinners at Gleneagles and dancing there to Henry Hall, of a grand day's sea excursion round Mull to see Staffa and Iona, an excursion that I only took under strong compulsion, so fearful was I of being sick, and so enjoyable that I would now undertake it even if I were certain of being sick.

Wales was responsible for providing me with the only journalistic scoop I ever got on the *Daily Telegraph*. My report was headed "A Thrilling Failure," and I was congratulated on having provided a better story than the reporters at Giggleswick who actually saw the eclipse.

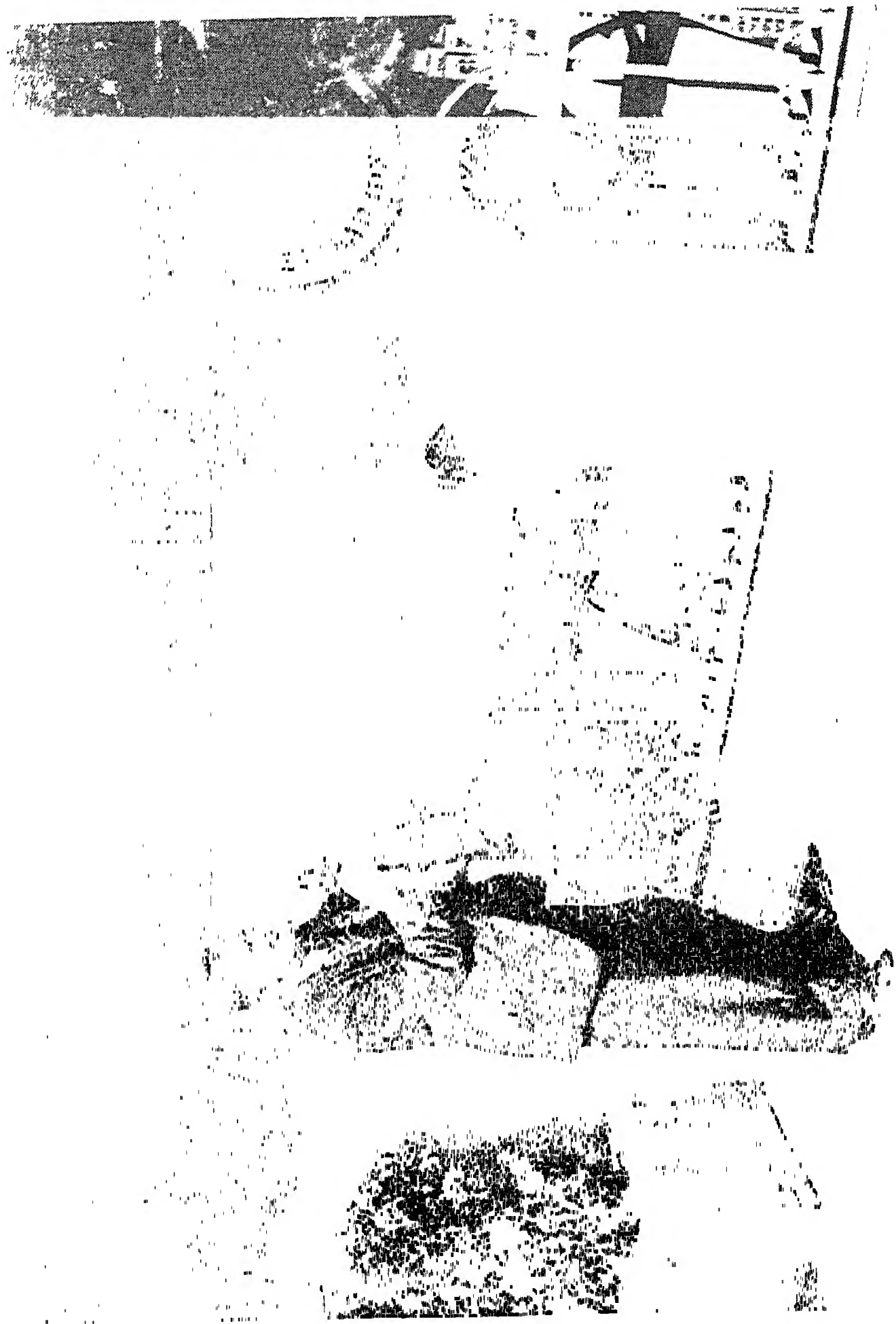
This is what I wrote :

So far as Snowdon was concerned, the eclipse gave those of us who spent the early hours of yesterday morning on its summit a realistic idea of what it must have felt like on Mount Ararat waiting for the Deluge to abate. We were unable even to look out over the waste of waters. We simply stood huddled together, hundreds of us, in a

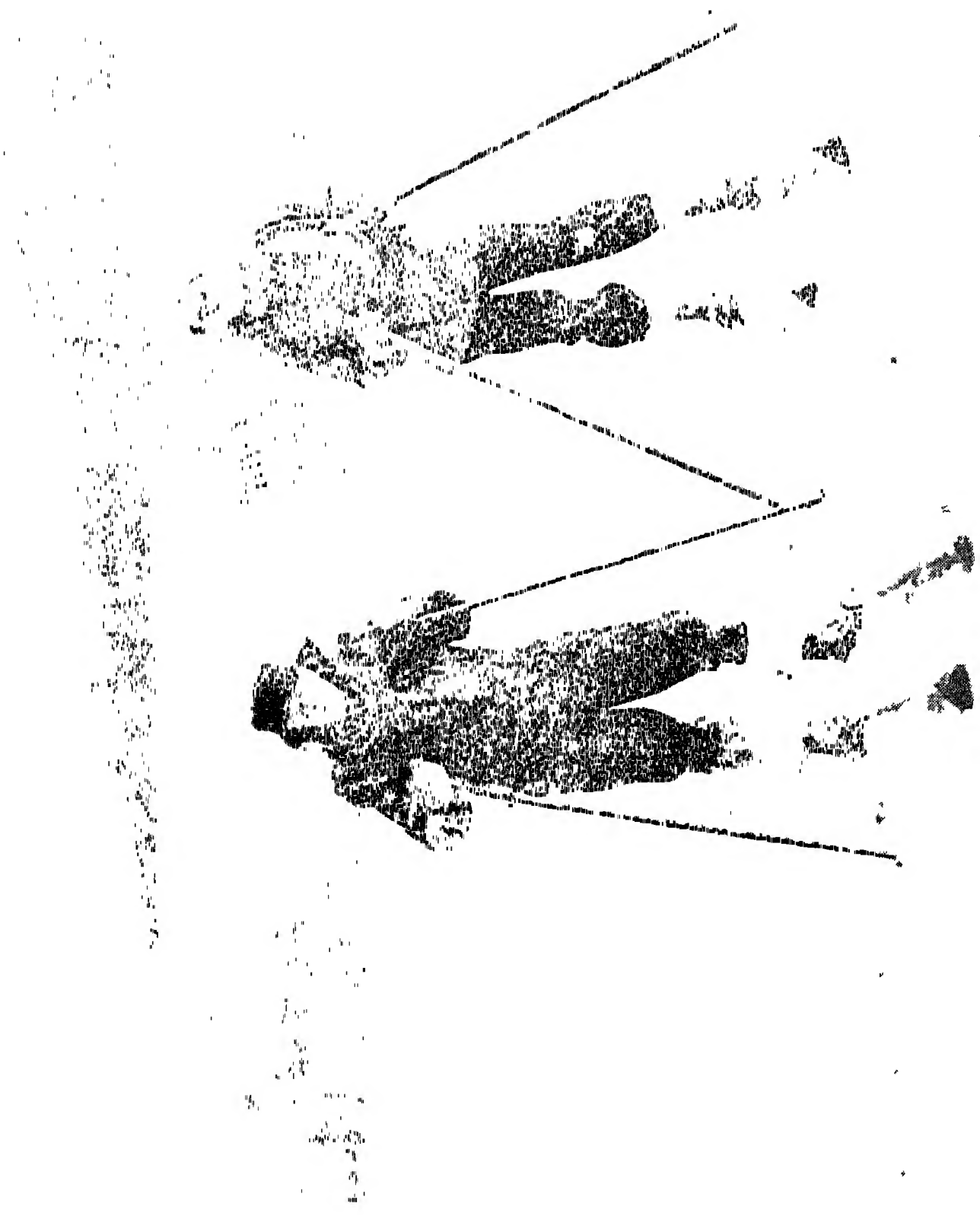
swirling tempest, unable to see more than a foot in front of us, with precipices on every side, wet to the skin, with ear-drums and temples throbbing, the surrounding fog getting ever grimmer and grimmer, until at the moment of totality we looked on the desolate and benumbing spectacle of volcanic scree turning a sinister purple—exactly the colour of the Llanberis slate quarries—before our eyes.

It was for this that for days beforehand we had climbed inaccessible peaks and got lost in the clouds in our endeavour to find the highest point from which we could get a clear view south-west to watch the wonderful shadow and north-east to see the not less marvellous corona. It was for this that we had waded, day in, day out, through a Wales of wild waters. With what care had we made compass adjustments, with what attention we had hung on every word uttered by the innumerable specialists, chemists from Oxford, geologists from Holland, astronomers from Germany, geographers from Leyden; how meticulously we had obeyed instructions about smoked glasses, and studied the diagrams of the moon's shadow. For days there had converged on the Welsh Highlands a steady army of enthusiastic sun-gazers. Eton masters had taken advantage of the Eton and Winchester match to make a reconnaissance from Pen-y-gwryd; Cambridge undergraduates had taken Gorphwsfa by assault; every cottage billeted its quota of cyclists, and cow-sheds were turned into garages. The natives, knowing the capacity of y Wyddfa to remain shrouded in her nightcap of cloud for weeks together, were all leaving for Criccieth by motor charabanc at 4.30.

We visitors, after a pretence of sleep, were roused at 2.30 to try our sporting chance on the mountain railway. It was so dark that it was not until we were actually walking to the station that we discovered that it was raining. By 3.30 we were ascending into and, we assured each other hopefully, above the clouds. It grew lighter in a wan sort of way and wetter, much wetter. Even the lower peaks selected by the professors



New York from the roof of Radio City



Ski-running down the Mohawk Trail, Schenectady

as certain of visibility were wreathed in wet mist; the path to the summit, a wet, scrambly track at the best of times, presented a strange picture. It was full of Welsh school children, mainly girls, picking their way through the bed of a fast-flowing stream. The wind blew through the none too well protected windows of the crowded train, and we gleefully watched a woman's hat sail 2000 ft. into oblivion. A moment later we too disappeared. The mists did not wait for us to rise to them. They came down to meet us. For 1500 ft. and more we crawled from one sort of density and clamminess to another; whenever we looked out we imagined sheer precipice.

The train came to a stop, the time was about five o'clock, and we peered about for signs of platform, refreshment hut, cairn, crowds. There was nothing but a drenching downpour and thick white mist. Dimly, after an interval, we discerned moving shapes, like wraiths lost on desert crags, and later a hut. We ran through the blinding rain to find ourselves in a wooden shanty, and in the middle a stove, around which stood and tried to stand some hundred bedraggled human beings, who were prepared to barter all their smoked glasses, compasses, diagrams and the rest of their eclipse paraphernalia for a cup of tea and dry socks. The eclipse was forgotten in the effort to keep warm and in some degree dry. Some of us dashed down into the mist to see if there was a chance of getting below that cloud-line, for obviously we were not going to be able to get above it. Very soon we returned to the camp, glad not to be lost for ever, greeted with cheers by the saner huddlers in the hut.

More and more trainloads were pitchforked on to the inhospitable eyrie, more and more climbers, more dead than alive, sank to rest on the floor of the hut. Some when they regained the use of their fingers began addressing post-cards; two fanatics produced a wireless set, upon which an elderly lady, not to be outdone, produced an ear-trumpet.

Suddenly everyone made a bee-line for the railway to

secure a berth for the homeward voyage. To our surprise we found ourselves moving. We looked at our watches. It was 6.15. The eclipse had been on for about an hour, and no one had noticed it. For one wild moment we hoped against hope that we might get below the cloud-line in time for totality. The minutes passed very slowly, when an awestruck cry was wrung from a Lewes schoolboy. "It's getting darker," he said. It certainly was. The mist, once white, was now murky. "Quite like London," remarked someone in a nervous effort at being jocular.

But the phenomenon was not to be laughed away. Here were we insecurely perched about 3200 feet above sea-level with precipices on either side, feeling of extremely small account in the world. For one thing we had not forgotten the lady's hat, and the wind seemed to have risen to a blizzard. The murkiness changed to an unearthly pall of purple. One imagined a sound of rushing wind, but there was no such thing. We prepared ourselves to be pitched into complete darkness. The hands of my luminous watch began to glare at me. "Zero hour," whispered someone. We all shivered, but still the train slipped down the perilous path. "It's getting light," said the boy, no longer awe-struck. It certainly was—speaking in a relative sense. The surrounding air once more assumed its ghostly wanness. The rain beat down more firecely than ever.

Heads began to nod in earnest now. No one troubled to stifle the oncoming yawns. It was not that the eclipse had failed to come off. It had succeeded in a way on which none of us had reckoned. We had expected the sun to be snuffed out. We had not counted on seeing it drenched out as if by bursting dams. It was certainly an unforgettable experience.

We who traversed the slopes of Snowdon took our sporting chance, but we were by no means defrauded. To cover 7000 ft. in altitude in a blinding blizzard before seven o'clock in the morning is probably a thing that few of the three hundred of us who took Snowdon for our look-out post are ever likely to do

again. And we had a total eclipse of the sun thrown in. The fact that we failed to see it is rather a feather in our caps. When other people right off the main path boast that they saw wonderful things from their own gardens or bedroom windows, we modestly pride ourselves that we were right in the dead centre of things and could scarcely have seen less had we been posted on a peak in Darien. For the sake of those who are preparing for the eclipse of 1999 we from experience would suggest sea-level.

My other experiences in Wales are confined to panegyrics about her Edwardian castles and secluded bathing beaches. It is odd to find a country so near home where men still pursue the primitive calling of coracle-carrying. But Wales to me of recent years has been a place of misery and starvation, of back-to-back houses, with puny babies, insufficiently nourished, men with despair in their eyes mooning about in rags, and no hope of anything better, of idle coal-pits, whole towns at a standstill, deathly silence where there should be activity, a drabness and an ugliness in almost any street in South Wales evil enough to make anyone capable of understanding or sympathy shudder that such conditions can be endured. No one travels in this part of Wales for fun.

I am supposed to be an authority on England. It is true that while most people go abroad I wander about through the counties, and I certainly know England from the train and from the main arterial road. But I am still, in spite of having walked and run thousands of miles over its downland and bridle-paths, very far from knowing it as it deserves to be known. But even my home country has provided me with many unexpected things. My encounters in the English countryside have been many and odd.

There was that colony of Tolstoyans at Whiteways on the Cotswolds, among whom I took shelter to escape a thunderstorm and found the woman of the house cutting the man's hair.

There was the old woman who spat at my mother and myself as we sat in the Cathedral Close at Exeter. There was the old woman who beckoned me into her cottage at Partridge Green to find out who the man was upstairs. "I've hidden his clothes," she said gleefully. I brought him down. It was her own husband, and she didn't recognise him. There was the old man dressed as a parson who knelt down in prayer in the fruiterer's in Salisbury, and nobody took the slightest notice. There was the lonely man on the sand-dunes of Blakeney picking up snail-shells who told me that he was Professor of Snails at Cambridge. There was the young man in the "Slip" Inn at Exeter who refused to speak as I walked home with him at closing-time.

But travelling in England nearly always cements friendships. I have heard more wisdom from shepherds than I ever read in the newspapers, and received more genuine friendship from tramps than I get from any wealthy acquaintances. I have received kindness at the hands of all farmers over whose land I have trespassed, and I have been greeted with courtesy in practically every inn I have entered.

The Scot is the most generous of men, and after him the man of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Children are everywhere pleasant, but I have particularly happy memories of the children in the school at Dungeness showing me how they slide their way to and fro over the shingle on wooden backstays.

I like travelling in England because I am familiar with the language, a tremendous boon, because I can stray off the high road and roam more or less where I like, because of its very great variety in small compass, and because of its quiet unobtrusiveness but compelling loveliness. There is a gracious serenity about the smooth curves of the southern downlands that soothes me when I am most perplexed. There is a grandeur about the northern fells that exhilarates me to whatever depth of despair I have sunk. The English country-side has been the most formative influence in my life in so far as

appreciation of beauty goes. Its appeal has been slow in making its effect, but it is the more lasting on that account.

I cannot believe that I shall ever so fully enjoy a holiday again in any other country in the world as I enjoyed those halcyon sunny days when we loitered along the Shropshire fields in an old canal barge under a June sun that was always kindly on our way to Llangollen. That was as good a foretaste of heaven as I want.

(ii) *Europe*

I have always loved exploring England so much that it has usually been under compulsion that I have left its shores.

My first visit to France was a lugubrious one. I was sent out to look after and report on the consignments of War widows who wished to visit their husbands' and sons' graves.

Later, spurred on by my father and mother, who thought that a holiday in France would be the making of me, I joined an advertised tour through Picardy, Normandy and Brittany. This entailed crossing the channel in the *Berengaria*. Of this crossing I remember best the life-belt practice, the flowers everywhere, and the glorious sense of luxury and comfort. As it was July and the ship was outward bound we had her practically to ourselves. I was surprised and delighted to see one of my own novels, *Frolic Lady*, in the ship's library.

Life changed very quickly after we left the ship. We were all put in charge of a guide who relied entirely on his facetiousness and a bowler hat to see him through. It was my first experience of a conducted tour. I remember two jovial Hull shop-girls. The rest of the party bore the stamp of the Midlands. None of us knew a word of French. Our first night was spent in an unbelievably dingy hotel which bore the sad look of being kept for improper purposes. Otherwise how could any visitor overlook the cobwebs, the damp, the cracked water-jugs, the plaster falling off the walls or

the broken window-panes? The people in the streets dressed in black, looked sinister, depressed and ugly.

Even to-day when I think of France I immediately think of Cherbourg. Any English prison would be preferable as a holiday resort. We were conveyed by a dangerous driver in a rickety motor charabanc singing all the way to Bayeux, where the whole company, led by Jimmy the guide, were funny at the expense of the famous tapestry, and we were quickly bundled on to Caen, where we had the good fortune to see a big Catholic procession.

A long drive the next day took us to Mont St. Michel where I marvelled at the spoliation of a lovely thing by tawdry vulgar shops at its feet, thence on to Dinard which I had been led to regard as sunny, fashionable and picturesque. It was none of these things. Fat Frenchwomen in bathing costumes posed for their fatter husbands, it rained nearly all the time, and the facilities for bathing were less than in any English seaside resort. I pined for Torquay. I found the insistence of the Frenchman on wearing black most depressing. The insistence of the Frenchman in cheating you of change, overcharging at every turn, and failing in ordinary matters of courtesy made me irritable. I paid 50 francs for a St. Christopher bracelet at Dinard that was marked 8.50 in St. Malo. While as for its quality of health-restoring I can only say that I was perfectly fit when I set out, and by the second day in Dinard I had a sore throat and a disordered stomach. Of all dull places I found Dinard the dullest. It goes to bed earlier than any English seaside town, and I am not surprised. No one in his senses wants to visit a casino twice, and there was nowhere else to go. In a land where all may drink at all times nobody drinks at any time.

We had two enjoyable excursions along the cliffs, which are very like the Cornish cliffs, and up the River Rance to Dinan. But the countryside was ruined for me by the absence of birds and animals. Most of our party went home after a week, but we went on by train to Paris.

We had struck the week of the National Fête, so I saw Versailles and Malmaison with the mob in possession. It was not edifying. I found the Parisians vulgar beyond belief. I made one discovery—the Café Voltaire—and I certainly liked the bookstalls on the south bank of the Seine. I was charged 60 francs for four beers at the Langer in the Champs Elysées.

I drank a good deal at considerable expense and saw a few dull cabarets. But except for Notre Dame I found nothing in Paris that I want to see again.

I went on to Dieppe in the hope of getting a little bathing, but I fell desperately sick and could do nothing. The reason, I discovered afterwards, was not that I was getting typhoid as the result of weeks of bad smells, but that I had drunk too much cheap wine.

I intended to cross from Dieppe, but the continual high wind made me afraid to cross so vast and rough an ocean (63 miles), so after a visit to Rouen, the only French city to which I want to return (it's as interesting as Chester), we made our way along the coast to Boulogne, where the gale increased so much in force that I refused to face even twenty miles of sea. I visited Le Touquet where it cost me 4s. 2d. to have my hair cut. The shops were fun, the hotels luxurious and in the pine-woods I found the only free place to walk in France. In Boulogne I stayed at an even less prepossessing hotel than the one at Cherbourg.

The feeling of relief at getting back to a country where people dressed well, the girls were pretty, the houses were clean, the streets washed, and people seemed able to laugh, was so great that I almost felt that the holiday was worth the misery entailed. Never again shall I talk of "La Belle France," or think of the French as gay.

In Paramé I saw two English girls arrested by gendarmes for appearing in shorts on the sea-front. In Paris I saw a crowd threatening a young English girl with obscene gestures because she dared to sit on a balcony above the street with her legs crossed slightly above the knee.

It does not attract an Englishman to France to be

charged two shillings for two cups of tea and two slices of cake as I was at Boulogne. Nobody likes being charged 3 fr. 50 for a packet of cigarettes that are plainly marked 2 fr. 50. Nobody likes being cheated at all. But I specially resent being cheated by the churlish.

English suburban bungalows are hideous enough, but they are gems of rare beauty compared with the "Dubonnet"-covered houses of France which all need several coats of plaster and paint to make them bearable. There are no parks or country houses anywhere. The only houses in the country are bare barracks, also sadly in need of paint.

France gives the impression of being at once pinch-beck, bankrupt and miserly. But as Arnold Bennett said: "It takes ten years for an Englishman to understand the French or to appreciate them aright." Life isn't long enough for France.

Switzerland, on the other hand, on my visits both to Mürren and Wengen, filled me with an acute longing to spend every winter there, but it is an expensive holiday, and few of us can afford to be away from home both in the summer and winter. But what I feel about it is evident from this letter home that I wrote from Wengen:

"We have had five consecutive days of glorious blue skies, days so unimaginably golden that one cannot conceive any other form of human happiness to compare with ours.

First, in the early morning, we wake to the singing of birds and the yodelling of workmen, and lazily watch from our beds the sun paint the silver-jagged edges of the high peaks a golden yellow.

By midday, after a healthy climb in the crispest, clearest, healthiest air in the world, we sit down in our shirt-sleeves in the baking sun and eat our picnic lunch at wooden tables outside some café nine or ten thousand feet above sea-level. Two hundred and fifty miles away we can see the Jura; between us and them is a billowy, still ocean of grey fluff.

We are far above the clouds. We gaze down on the one side sheer four thousand feet into the valley of

Lauterbrunnen, on the other to the virgin slopes of our route down to Grindelwald. We are on the top of the Mannlichen, with a view in every direction so superb that it becomes impossible to communicate our joy in words.

Above us are the Wetterhorn, Monch, Eiger and Jungfrau, glacier-green and windswept. Below us are the vast forests and unending snowfields, all glistening in the sun like a smooth desert of diamonds.

After a long rest and much coffee, we start down on the greatest joy of all—the eight-mile run to Grindelwald.

The slope is exactly what you choose to make it. You can cut a straight path through the crisp untouched crust, and whirl through the air at a speed that actually takes your breath away (the beginner always does this), or you can swing and sway and turn and choose your slopes, as the expert does, to prolong the joy of running.

There is no exertion required in all the six-thousand-foot drop. You need never stop. You just go on cutting tracks in a white sea that whistles behind you as your skis carve their line.

You descend into the woodlands, where there are tracks of chamois and white hares everywhere. You swish past chalets, through gates, over submerged fences, and other signs of civilisation. All too soon the glory of the descent is over.

There is still Frau Wolter's, where you buy the most appetising cakes in Switzerland, still the train journey back with the guides yodelling and the railway officials more angry than ever. They are never not angry. There is the hot bath waiting in the hotel (unless someone else has seized it).

There is dinner, to be followed by three hours' dancing, before a final walk under a black sky studded with stars, with the edges of the peaks all round us making it appear as if we were in the bottom of a huge white cup, chipped round the edges.

To spend one's time thus is to have the best holiday in the world. Weigh on the one side the disadvantages of the cost, which is much more than it need be, especially on the railways and in the shops, of the chances of

accidents, which are about the same as the chances while playing football, of the distance, the insolence of officials—they are as nothing compared with the amazing change that comes over us after a week.

The mountain sickness goes, the snow and the heights no longer depress; sleet, thaw, and rain are no more. We become brown with sun, we never tire, yet we sleep dreamlessly, the air acts as food, tonic and drink. We spend all the sunny hours racing, climbing, turning, running. There is always something to learn.

Alternately depressed and elated at our progress, we live solely for ski-running. Skating and curling may be left for our dotage. We are all ski-ers, first and last. And for perfect slopes, infinitely various, give me Wengen, and you can keep the rest of Switzerland. . . .

I breakfast off a cup of coffee; at 10.15 I rush for a strange train round which surge a motley crew of creatures garbed in the most garish and fantastic costumes, struggling to place unwieldly skis on an open truck.

At 10.35 the monster ploughs its way up into another land of mist and snows until the line is too much blocked with snow for further progress.

We disembark, fight for our skis, and climb in single file laboriously for hours towards the sky.

About midday we reach a lonely chalet surrounded by avalanches and glaciers. We stack our skis like hop-poles and go indoors for chocolate, honey, rum, brandy and hot soup.

We start to move; we move far more quickly than we ever thought it possible for a human being to move, unless he were being propelled electrically. In sudden fear we decide to stop. In a cloud of snow we disappear, our skis in the air, our ears, eyes, mouth and hair a glorious white powder.

A distant thunderous roar warns me that avalanches are in fashion. I emerge from the wood on to an icy luge run. No longer have I the necessity of guiding. Everything is taken out of my hand.

I fall over precipice after precipice. I roll as fast as I

run. Somehow I arrive in civilisation again, wet to the skin, and sink, exhausted, in a *pâtisserie*.

Someone whispers that the train is just going up again. I rush for the truck, throw my skis in, and begin all over again. And at night we all meet as if we had been merely gardening or taking the children to a *matinée*, and dance the next day in.

When I say "we," I do not mean just the sort of people we dance with in the Savoy or at the Grafton Galleries. The Public Schools and Universities are certainly well represented, but there are Medes and Parthians and travellers from far Kashmir, all superbly efficient at hurling themselves down these slopes.

There are all sorts of unexpected things about winter sports of which nothing is told us in the advertisements. There are, for instance, those balloon-like quilts on our beds, those staggering peaks of the Jungfrau, Monch and Eiger, pink-tipped at sunset; there are the officials on the funicular, more awe-inspiring with the ferocity with which they seize and tear your tickets than any magistrate or schoolmaster.

'I am angry with your gloves,' says the stationmaster, apoplectic with rage at the casual Englishman who leaves his gloves on the line.

All the races of the universe are here. Switzerland is no longer the playground of Europe, it is the playground of the world.

It is curious how, even here, in this Paradise, where we spend all our days slicing without effort some tens of thousands of feet of untouched crisp snow as if our skis were automatic scissors slitting at colossal speed a world of calico—even here, I say, it is curious how much more interested we are in people than in places.

We are agreed that Wengen has the finest ski-running slopes in Switzerland. We are agreed that the views from the Mannlichen and the Lauterhorn are the finest in Europe. We take these things for granted.

We never take the people for granted. The other visitors are to us the most interesting. There are the stalwart elderly ladies who are to be found in dangerous

untracked snow quietly plodding along on ski to get a better view. There are the young and beautiful girls in lemon and magenta tunics, trousers and puttees, who are graceful and lovely so long as they stand still, but strangely unwieldly and gawky when they start to go downhill.

There are the other girls, unostentatious in their clothes, in khaki tunic and trousers and velour sports hat. You may not notice them till the time comes for action. It is on the steep slopes that you find them, swinging and swaying with all the glorious ease of a gull, plunging straight as an arrow like a peregrine dropping on its prey.

There are the undergraduates, a little aloof and superior, daring all things in full cut trousers, leather waistcoats, and porters' caps. They are born ski-runners, who take nothing too seriously.

There are the slightly older and more tolerant officers on leave from the Navy, the Army, and the R.A.F. They differ from the undergraduates in their technique. They know the ropes. They are test men. They know what to attempt and what not to attempt.

They get angry with the foolhardy, they are amazingly quick and efficient in time of need; they sit in the bar at night and talk intelligently while undergraduates dance with girls who have barely left the schoolroom.

There are lonely, doleful, shy men of uncertain age in white woolly caps, who carve with slow, unhurrying feet, figures of eight on the ice. They take refuge in the lounge behind a Tauchnitz. Sometimes they become friendly enough to play chess.

I represent the commonest type of all, the ski-maniac, whose mind is concentrated solely on learning some one new thing every day, how to cope with hard frozen ice-tracks, how to cross avalanche snow, how to behave in a blizzard, how and when to wear skins, how and when to wax, what turn to make in what snow, and at what angle.

We crash in the rear of the experts as they swing easily down steep woods and try uncharted ways. We learn to avoid going blind, and we begin to pick up some

elements of snow craft and (on occasion) to control our ski.

We look forward to the great day when we shall no longer have to fall in order to stop.

Our conversation runs solely on technical details of ski-ing. There are people who come to Switzerland for other purposes. We know nothing of them.

It is the greatest charm of ski-ing that there is always something still to learn from everybody.

What I principally want to know is how to avoid falling through sheer fright. There are certain slopes and certain speeds that fill me with terror, so, perhaps, I am not of the commonest type of all.

The commonest type of ski-runner simply lets himself go, and trusts that when he falls it will be in soft snow. He is usually lucky."

I was recently invited by a Travel Agency to accompany a party of tourists to Prague, the High Tatras, Cracow, Warsaw and Berlin. I was offered no fee, but I was allowed to travel free. In a pamphlet I read that the tour was to be "under the distinguished guidance of Mr. S. P. B. Mais." I saw too that I was billed to lecture to the party. That I declined to do. I also told the agency that I had no languages and had never before visited these countries. That apparently didn't matter. My name was used as a bait, and all I was expected to do was to be affable. The tour was really looked after by a very able young Cambridge undergraduate called Baillie-King who got no sleep from the time he left England till the day he got back.

I had no idea that it was such a business conveying a party of presumably literate and intelligent Britishers across Europe. They were presumably unusually literate and intelligent because they were labelled "University Travel Guild," though what distinguishing mark they bore beyond the badge "U.T.G." I never discovered.

Very soon we were covered with badges and numbers. It was very like my trip to France. At one moment I

was a member of a reasonable society, unhurried, my own master, in a cosy English seaside village. The next I found myself in the vortex of an appalling maelstrom at Victoria Station where harassed officials were endeavouring to despatch seven train-loads of perplexed passengers to the Continent. I was lucky in having two young cousins with me as well as Jill.

In my carriage were a bachelor schoolmaster whose one object was to secure the corner seat of the railway-carriage all across Europe, another bachelor schoolmaster with a passion for eliciting information, a coy, middle-aged woman who soon burst into song, and a fuzzy-haired woman who had never been out of England before.

It was a cold, wet, foggy crossing to Ostend, and the boat was so overcrowded that there was nowhere to sit down. We had left Woolacombe in a heat-wave.

I found Belgium depressing, Germany pleasantly cleaned up and smart, but entirely military. At Cologne our University Travel Guilders of thirty-five spinsters and seven males marched out of the station under a U.T.G. banner and were eventually and with difficulty bedded in different hotels. I should have appreciated the loveliness of Cologne cathedral more if a tooth had not suddenly become troublesome and the streets had not been so filled with men and girls in uniform very pleased with themselves. After the dirt of France the cleanliness of Cologne was delightful, and certainly I saw nothing in northern France to compare with the valley of the Rhine. It took me over an hour to realise that the rows of green vines were not hop-bines but vines. The castles perched on the high crags were as romantic as Byron made them appear. The weather had got hot again, and there were bathers all along the river banks and geese in great profusion.

I fell in love with the ancient medieval city of Nuremberg just as I had fallen in love with Rouen, but I was now suffering so much from my tooth, which had caused my whole jaw to swell prodigiously, that I was incapable even of being affable to the thirty-five spinsters who were

waiting for me to guide and lecture to them. All I remember was an endless search for chemists, a drug called veramon, some memory of Dürer, and red gable-ends.

We passed on into Czechoslovakia, a land of oxen yoked to the plough, sandy lanes, pine trees at Marienbad, a band playing in Pilsen, barefooted, bareheaded girls driving geese, brown bathers, and so to Prague which smelt worse than Cherbourg. The city water-supply had been cut off. We arrived in a heat-wave and I had to find a dentist. We found one who claimed to understand though he could not speak English, and all he understood was the reverse of my feeling. When in taking the stopping out and drilling the evil tooth he hurt me more than I thought it possible to be hurt, he thought that I was enjoying it. When he wasn't hurting me at all he stopped and offered me whisky. I drank half a bottle neat. He thought more of me after that. But even so he couldn't cope with my mouth and wanted to take me off to hospital. I had visions of some Czech surgeon removing my jaw. I refused. I struggled round the palace of Masaryk and good King Wenceslas. I watched the thirty-five spinsters wrestle with their twelfth meal of veal running (who said that Continental dishes were appetising?).

I returned to the dentist who laid the tooth open "to let the poison out," but he seemed lugubrious about the result. I prepared the broadcast which I had agreed to give, with Jill applying hot fomentations to my face in a city where water of any sort was at a premium. I was given 400 kronen, that is £3 15s., for a ten-minute talk, and I spent it at once on the dentist and all over again on a Longines wrist-watch to remind me of him. I felt so ill that I decided to go home. So I bought a ticket on the Dutch K.L.M. aeroplane for £12, and as soon as I had paid it the pain lessened and I let the aeroplane go without me. I tried by every means in my power to get my money back, but I didn't then know the tenacity of the Dutch. It is wiser to pay a Dutchman after you have received the goods.

As all I really remember of Prague is of fierce Englishwomen eating veal, a few schoolmasters searching in vain for a night-club, and a dark bedroom in a heat-wave with no water, I am surprised at my temerity in broadcasting.

From Prague we went on up into the high Carpathians, and after twelve hours in the stuffy train with my face all muffled up, we arrived at the station for Strbske Pleso. A long night-drive up through the forests in an open motor charabanc did nothing to improve my face, but the hotel when we arrived was huge and luxurious, and looked out over a vast lake to dark pine woods and great mountain peaks. The next day I climbed about two thousand feet only to get caught in the rain without a coat, and ran down to drown my sorrows in vermouth. We celebrated Baillie-King's twenty-first birthday in this mountain hotel.

We drove right over the Carpathians into Poland in another open motor charabanc, passing mountain villages with timber huts that reminded me of Switzerland. After a visit to an eerie mountain tarn called Morskie Oko (the Eye of the Sea), where I drank the first of many hundred vodkas, we drove on to Zakopane, an inland health resort which smelt of bad drains. The peasants here were dressed in most picturesque embroidered tunics and trousers. We spent the night in Cracow, a most attractive city of colour and medieval buildings. The hotel had enormous bedrooms with double folding-doors. I imagine it must have been a palace in ancient days. It had a Turgeniev atmosphere about it.

I suddenly got a desire to buy a chess set, but when I thought I had mastered the word the antique dealer smiled and sent a body of men upstairs. They came down staggering under the weight of an enormous old master.

Cracow is academic and medieval. Warsaw is cosmopolitan and industrialised. I there had my introduction to the squalor and misery of the Jewish ghetto. It is small wonder that Jews lay such stress on the getting of money when one thinks of the abjectness of the homes from which they spring.

I was given a little more time to prepare my broadcast on Poland, and I was less troubled by my teeth, but my sole reward was a glass of liqueur brandy.

This is what I said :

“ As I entered your country for the first time in my life less than eighty hours ago, you will forgive me if I refrain from explaining to you what you must know a good deal better than I do, but it may perhaps amuse you to see how much I have missed in three hurried days.

I came into Poland over the mountains of the South, and my first halting-place in your country was on the shores of the lake of Morskie Oko, under the shadow of the High Tatra. The sun, shining out of the deep, untroubled blue sky, had melted all but the most obstinate drifts of snow that lay tucked away in the darkness of a few overhanging corries, a pleasant reminder that winter in the Carpathians also has its compelling power for the traveller.

I was struck at first by the impressive silence and majesty of the scene. So still was it that the rising of the dark fish (were they mountain trout ?) to snatch at a fly, and the plash of the oars of one large rowing-boat full of priests in the middle of the lake, seemed to re-echo all round the mountain-side. I could see the shining flash of the waterfall connecting the upper and lower lakes, but could neither see it fall nor hear its roar.

Then my eye rose to the jagged rock-peaks themselves, wet and glittering in the sun, inviting the climber to take the winding tracks above the tree-line. And indeed as I looked I saw many young men and women with knapsacks on their backs, bare-headed, bronzed with the summer sun, ascending and descending these tracks.

I saw more wanderers as I turned through the woods northwards, some carrying bunches of purple heather, others with giant gentian that seemed to have borrowed its colour from the sky.

Large butterflies of saffron and white fluttered among the wayside flowers as we drove past the long, low, straw-bedded carts that took the winding road to Zakopane. And everywhere there were swallows, twittering under

the eaves of the pearl-grey steep-pitched wooden roofs of the farm-houses.

Even I, ignorant as I am, had long heard of Zakopane as a centre for ski-ing and winter sports, but I was totally unprepared for its size, its summer activity, and its atmosphere of spontaneous romanticism. Of its romantic setting it is unnecessary to say more than that it lies snugly among the pine trees with the peaks of the Tatra rising above, just far enough away to make you ache to climb them whenever you looked up to them, not near enough to overpower you with their grimness. Indeed, they are not grim at all—the fact that a crucifix stands on the top-most peak is a proof of its accessibility to man. But the people of Zakopane seemed to me to outdo in colour and picturesqueness even the richness of their surroundings.

In England, as all the world knows, men dress too sombrely. We are a black-coated race. Only in Scotland, to which your country bears resemblance in many unexpected ways, do men dress as colourfully as the Highlanders of Zakopane.

I can think of no more becoming headgear for men than the Zakopane inverted bowl surrounded by white shells, no more becoming or useful form of trouser than the richly-embroidered lambskin trousers of the yellow droshky-drivers with their red blobs at the feet. No wonder that these men smile so easily and look so happy. They realise as only too few of us do, how great a part colour plays in the fostering of happiness. The gardens of Zakopane were a riot of gold and blue, and the sky-blue doors and window-frames of the houses carried on with brilliant bold splashes of paint the boldness of the sunflowers, the asters and geraniums; the shawls of the old women contained all the colours of the rainbow, and the flowers grew again on the scarlet and blue embroidered tunics and waistcoats of the children.

It seemed altogether fitting that my last memory of Zakopane should be that of showers of flowers being thrown through the carriage-window of the train as we gathered steam and made our way in the fast-fading light towards Cracow.

My first impression of the ancient city of Cracow was of a sky studded with stars, towards which the two fair towers of the Church of Our Lady yearned in the darkness.

The sound that I shall for ever associate with Cracow, after that of the tlot-tlot of the droshky horses over the setts, is that of the trumpeter as clear cut in the ring of his notes as the stars towards which his clarion call rang out. Again a spontaneous romanticism.

Early on Sunday morning I wandered into the sunlit Rynek, and, armed with roses that I had bought from a market girl as fair as the flowers she sold, I entered the Church of Our Lady.

Again and immediately I was spellbound by the wealth of colour.

Shafts of sunlight picked out here the draped yellow shawl of a praying woman, and there the chiselled features of a dark-skinned boy. My eyes were dazzled by the feast of colour. It was as if the thank-offerings of the vast congregation were taking on a visible hue and ascending heavenward.

And later in the morning I found corroboration for this feeling as I stood in the Church of St. Francis and saw for the first time in my life that magnificently bold conception of God the Father separating Light from Darkness that fills the West window.

I am not sufficiently *au fait* with modern artistic influences to assess the value of your artist, Wyspianski. But the mystical devotion that finds expression in his stained-glass interpretation of St. Francis and Salome, the love of humanity that finds expression in his pictures of motherhood and contented and anxious childhood, the love of country that shines through his superb pictures of a Poland under snow and storm and sun, these are so richly manifested in his work as to ensure him not only a high place in the esteem of his own fellow-countrymen, but a world-wide immortality. I am stressing this point with particularity because it shows how much you have put the world in your debt æsthetically.

Even the least musical of us is conscious of the immense

debt that we owe to Chopin, while all the world acknowledges its debt to Copernicus. Everyone who reads at all in my country acknowledges Conrad as one of the great masters of our literature, while your Nobel Prize winners, Raymont and Sienkiewics, prove how high a place your own literature holds. But it seems to me that we are doing your painters much less than justice.

The richness of colour and originality of design in the work of not only Wyspianski but of Stryjenska is surely more than ordinarily arresting.

The world needs much more of their spirit to-day.

But inspiration obviously comes easily to those who mingle with the dancing peasants of the Tatra and those who loiter under the shadow of the many-towered Barbican of Cracow; a city that seemed to me to be nearly rose-pink, so mellowed with centuries of sun are its castle and city walls.

On Sunday afternoon as I wheeled my barrow full of earth on to the vast mound that commemorates your great Marshal Pilsudski I got an insight into another quality of your race that fills an Englishman with profound admiration.

The deep devotion to his country and undeviating courage that characterised Kosciuscko in an earlier day repeated itself in an even more remarkable degree in Marshal Pilsudski.

The Pilsudski Mound, helped to rise by earth carried from all over the world, will remain as a symbol of profound significance not only to Poland, but to all men who believe in the progress of mankind. The sight of the unending stream of patriots toiling up the hill in the hot Sunday sun each with his barrow-load is not a thing that will quickly be erased from the memory of any who have seen it or shared in the ritual.

It so chanced that on returning from the Mound I met a Boy Scout in the Rynek. We stopped to exchange courtesies.

I learned that he was a young lawyer from Pozen who had spent his vacation walking all those hundreds of miles under the broiling sun to lay his pile of earth on

the summit of the Mound, and thus to pay his tribute to the dead leader whose spirit lives and will continue to live in the hearts of his people.

Later in the day over a hundred of us English visitors were entertained to a very unusual and highly intellectual treat in the form of a lecture delivered in our own language by Professor Dyboski of the University of Cracow. He had given up the whole of the day to showing us the outstanding features of his city, and set the seal on a memorable visit by a brilliant résumé of your national history.

We were therefore able more fully yesterday to appreciate the wealth of the treasures in Cracow castle—who could ever forget those Dürer frescoes?—and to lay our wreath at the foot of the Marshal's tomb in the Cathedral crypt with a clearer understanding of your national aims and an even deeper sympathy with them than we had before.

And so in the heat of yesterday afternoon we left Cracow for Warsaw, and from the railway carriage window I again saw scene after scene that cried out for the artist to give them immortality. Here a young girl sitting on a green bank, coloured handkerchief tied under her chin, stick between knees, lost in contemplation, here a group of laughing, waving boys, leaving the haymaking to come and wave at the passing train. Here the women raking in the hay, children in groups walking home over the straggling field-paths, men carrying the hay in the long low basket carts past wayside crucifixes, here a white church with red-roofed or thatched cottages clustering round it on a green and brown knoll looking for all the world like a piece of our own Sussex. Here a team of horses ploughing arable, here a girl shooing the geese and here a girl carrying water. Everywhere the peasant happily at work, until night, unlike our English night, which steals softly over the landscape as if reluctant to hide it, until your night closed on it like the shutter of a camera, blotting out an impression that was now pure Matisse and now pure Constable.

But before night came I had occasion to wonder at and to applaud the combination of efficiency and harmony

of time that characterise your rural stations. The touch of vivid blue and white, the almost austere simplicity of design are a further proof of your innate instinct for æsthetic effect.

Of Warsaw it would be absurd for me to speak after these few hours.

I made a bee-line, as you may well guess, to see further examples of Wyspianski's art in your very complete National Museum, and on the way to his room found a masterly picture by Gierimski, of the bereaved father and mother sitting above the sleeping dog with the bright blue coffin of their child propped up against the wall.

Really Warsaw seems to be the very birthplace of all that is lovely in modern art.

I have just caught a glimpse of the magnificent Jerusalem Avenue, of the imposing Pilsudski Square which gives the dignified buildings that enclose it room to make their symmetry appreciated. I have stood amazed at the many-coloured houses in the old Rynek, the most brilliant of them painted by Stryenski. I have drunk mead in the ancient house of Fakier, stood before the monument of Chopin, walked in the gardens of the Summer Palace and thought myself in Versailles, and driven past excellent examples of new housing schemes. I have so far seen only the outside of your vast Opera House, Castle and Cathedral.

I have passed rapidly from the very old to the very new. The sorting out of my impressions will come later. All that I can now express is my gratitude to you for keeping alive in the world a love of the arts, particularly of music and of painting.

We envy you your easy courtesy, the beauty of your women, the alertness of your youth, and the admirable tempo of your life.

How I wish I could reintroduce the horse-carriage into London. Our modern hurry leads us nowhere. But I should like to know if and when you ever go to bed."

The only other thing I can remember about Poland is a very inferior Zoological Gardens where English

pigs are treated as wild animals, and the fact that when we were entertained by the Warsaw Chamber of Commerce our hosts arrived without apology an hour late. That and a further vain chase for a chess set for myself and red sandals for Jill was the end of our Polish experience.

We returned to England by way of Berlin, a brisk, expensive city with splendid new suburbs among the woods, and an infinite variety of night clubs. Next door to the Hotel Adlon I found the chess set I wanted. The price was a thousand marks. Berlin is a depressing city of blood and iron, heavily regimented, entirely military minded. Hitler is regarded as several times more important than God. I was glad that the arrangements for me to broadcast my impression of Germany fell through. I could have thought of nothing complimentary to say.

Acting on the principle that it is good to try everything once I agreed, in spite of my ignorance of the land, the people and their language, to give eight lectures in Holland on the way to see England. I was to be offered hospitality. I had to pay my own fares and in return for my services I was to receive six guineas a lecture. In view of the rate of exchange (the pound is worth about seven shillings) this was not generous, but I conjectured that it might just cover expenses. My conjecture was wrong. A single return ticket from London to the Hook cost me £6 17s. 6d. Had I travelled on Saturday rather than Sunday the cost would have been reduced by £2 10s. But nobody told me that.

The ship *Amsterdam* was reassuring, the cabin de luxe as comfortable as any Atlantic liner. The night was cold but, in spite of newspaper prophecies, the sea was smooth. For this I was grateful as Jill was in the throes of a severe cold and needed rest. I was not impressed by my first view of the Hook seen early in a grey cold February morning, but the train to the Hague was electric and warm and took less than an hour. But this hour provided me with a view of much canalised water flat fields, windmills and a people mainly in black an

almost all riding bicycles, unsmiling, and physically without attraction of face or form.

I was struck on arrival at the Hague by its quietness. There were few cars, but a never-ending stream of cycles, all very dangerous to the pedestrian, for the cyclist in Holland is lord of the road, rides two abreast holding hands, looks anywhere but in front of him, and rides fast. No Dutchman on a bicycle would live for five minutes on an English road.

I sat in the Terminus Hotel watching the traffic, wondering at the number of cigar-smokers. Everybody smokes, and everybody smokes cigars. They sit bolt upright on their bicycles which have raised handlebars, to the ends of which are permanently fixed a pair of gauntlets.

The pride of the Hague is the Mauritshaus where I spent a happy hour enjoying colours that were sadly lacking outside. I wondered where Brueghel found his vitality. I had somehow imagined a country of fields ablaze with hyacinths and tulips in full flower. There were certainly cut flowers in every window—the Dutch love of flowers is as noticeable as their love of pictures—but I saw no flowers growing. They grow later, not earlier than they grow in England.

At night I gave my first lecture and discovered: (i) intense disappointment at my failure to bring slides, which made me realise that the Dutchman understand English less well than he pretends, (ii) that the Dutch custom is for lectures to continue for two hours with a break for coffee in the middle. The audience was small, stolid and silent. They were clean but more dowdily dressed than any country vicarage party of the 'eighties. I was carefully shepherded into and out of the room by a formidable committee of six who did little to encourage any intimacy between the audience and the speaker. I found it difficult to be interested in them. The situation was saved for me by the presence of the British Ambassador and his secretary, who was once my pupil, so I could count on two people understanding what I was driving at. The luncheons that I enjoyed at the

Legation with the secretary stand out as colourful oases in a very arid desert.

On leaving The Hague I passed the bulb fields of Haarlem and saw sand-dunes carefully preserved against the rider and rambler. These sand-dunes provide the only relief from the flatness and the wetness. Everywhere else were rectangular strips of fields divided by thin dykes and canals along which barges moved slowly.

And so I came to Amsterdam with its Venice-like waterways running between shops and houses. In Amsterdam there were more bicycles than ever. Only in the local Bond Street, a narrow passage-way known as the Kalverstraat, were there no ridden bicycles. Here the pedestrian came into his own, overflowing into the road as he does in an English market-town on Saturday night. The difference was that the English crowd in even the most outlying market-town dress better, laugh more, move more alertly, and look much more physically attractive. The attractions of the Kalverstraat are the big-windowed cafés where I sat drinking excellent coffee, gin, and "half and half," looking out on a people whose only beauty lay in their legs, which are trim and neat.

I found my audience here as stodgy and unreceptive as the audience at The Hague, which augured ill for my efforts to please the provinces. And indeed the next day I received a very rude awakening at Apeldoorn. The country changed from wet green fields to one of dry heather and small fir trees growing on sand, entirely devoid of human or of animal life. Over the green country flew the grey-backed crow who returns to Norway as the weather improves. There were, unexpectedly, a few buzzards, and, more reasonably, many coots and herons in the wet land where men were cutting reeds for thatching, but in this heather-covered land there was nothing except a succession of signs: "Vorboden toegang"—"Forbidden to go." In Holland you are not encouraged to stray from the beaten track. There is one track for cyclists and another track for walkers.

And so I came by way of the aeries of Hilversum and

the woods of Amersfoort to the royal summer palace of Apeldoorn, a place that will remain long in my memory by virtue of or rather by lack of virtue of its hotel. I looked out on to one of the ugliest pseudo-Gothic churches I ever set eyes on. I was ushered up steep stairs to a room which could only be heated by a gas contraption which either blew out with the wind if I opened a window or threatened to blow up the pipes with excessive heat. I lay down to watch the passing cavalcade. This consisted of two elaborate funerals with men in admirals' black cocked hats, walking in pairs in front of carriages in which all the blinds were drawn. Even the hearse had blinds down to hide the coffin. I saw so many funerals all over Holland that I began to suspect a plague. But it may have been only coincidence or ostentation.

At dinner-time I went down to an ice-cold dining-room that lay beyond a bar with two billiard tables. To keep warm I walked briskly up and down between courses. It took half an hour for the soup to arrive, a further half-hour for the inevitable veal, if it was veal. They eat horse in Holland, and I probably ate more horse than calf. I ordered, to cheer myself up, and to help Jill to live through the evening, a bottle of sparkling moselle. It was warm and undrinkable, and I was charged twelve shillings for it.

I sent Jill to bed, and faced an audience as cold as the room in which they sat, the same in which I had dined. When I got upstairs I found the bedroom almost entirely gas-filled. Jill was so ill in the morning that I searched for the "apothek," but my pronunciation of the word made all those whom I questioned stare blankly and walk on. In the end I found a specialist who told her that she had poisoned herself with the very stuff that she had taken to cure her.

The time at last arrived for us to leave and I found myself presented with a bill for 14 guilders 75 cents for Jill. My expenses were supposed to be paid. Having no change I offered £1 notes and the proprietor allowed me 7 guilders for each pound. When I remonstrated

that the rate was 7·27 he said that his bank only allowed him 7·10 and that he could give me only 7 guilders.

When Randolph Churchill visited Apeldoorn he acted more wisely than I did. He gave one look at this hotel and demanded another one. As Apeldoorn is the summer palace of the Queen it is foolish to permit this kind of hotel to continue to give the place a probably undeserved bad name.

On leaving Apeldoorn, Jill, finding the heat of the carriage too oppressive, opened the window in the corridor. Instantly a Dutchman from another compartment rushed out to shut it. Again Jill opened it. A second Dutchman shut it. A third time she opened it, and to my surprise the victory rested with her.

Our journey was to Groningen, the University town on the north-eastern German frontier. The way to it was long and tedious, relieved in part by an imitation Scottish moor again noticeable for its lack of animal life. I saw two rabbits, the only ones I saw in all Holland. The cottages and farms were of red brick with high-pitched roofs, and in them rested not only the cottagers but the cattle, for it was not yet warm enough for them to be let out in the fields. Occasionally I saw a child in yellow-painted clogs ; often I passed a poultry farm, and sometimes saw a man ploughing.

Then at Groningen I found a very pleasant surprise. We were most hospitably entertained by a Dutch banker called Mees, whose house was full of old prints and Oriental vases. The East has left an indelible mark on Holland, and everywhere I met men who had spent years in the East Indies and been impregnated with Oriental taste. The University influence permeates Groningen. My audience was more alert and the shops were full of English books. The Royal Naval Brigade during the War were interned there. I was shown some interesting frescoes recently revealed under the white-wash of the very lofty cathedral, a bare fourteenth-century of brick with foot-warmers for the congregation filled with peat which they burn during the services.

The next day I left for Amersfoort and stayed in a new

thatched brick house with a young schoolmaster with a real zest for English but, to my distress, no zest for drink. The Dutch will spend money on flowers and food, but not willingly on drink.

I went for a walk in the woods near Amersfoort, and actually climbed a hill about two hundred feet high on the summit of which was a tall monument erected as a thank-offering by the Belgian refugees in the War. A garish Catholic girls' school of red brick stood below blocking out half the view of the forest. But Amersfoort woods came as a revelation. Boys and girls were playing hockey in a clearing. Boys and girls were cycling along the "Rieuwpad" or cycle tracks, while even the "voetpads" were being used. The road from the Monument through the forest becomes a bobsleigh run when the snow permits.

At my lecture, held as usual in a restaurant, one member of the committee surprised me in the interval by showing me her cheeks, and saying: "I feel quite flushed with enthusiasm." For one moment I thought she must be an American. She also wrote a postcard of appreciation, the single written testimonial that I got throughout the tour.

I was glad to get back to Amsterdam for the week-end. I put up at the Central Hotel which belongs to the Y.M.C.A. It was cheap (less than £1 per night for bed and breakfast), comfortable, warm and central. On the strength of the reception accorded to my lectures I judged the Dutch to be phlegmatic. I was the more bewildered to be kept awake in the early hours of Sunday morning by shouts, cheers, hand-clapping and laughter of young Christians dancing at the Y.M.C.A. cabaret.

Saturday in the Kalverstraat was different from Saturday night at Grantham or Runcorn or Widnes by reason of the Jews. Amsterdam diamond-cutters are all Jews, but there must be other trades and professions that they adorn, for every second passer-by was a Jew.

At the end of the Kalverstraat I found the Rembrandt Plein which bears an uncanny resemblance to Leicester Square. This is the centre of the restaurants, cabarets and

theatres. For two guilders I had an excellent dinner at the "Schiller" and after dinner wandered round the shops, which do not shut till 10 p.m. I saw the "Lord Eden" hat advertised for thirty shillings.

On Sunday I lunched at the "Lido" which overlooks a canal for approximately the price of a Lord Eden hat, and recovered in the Rijks museum where a large crowd of patriots stood before Rembrandt's more anatomical pictures in reverence. The only possibly attractive visitor out of thousands turned out to be English.

That night I tasted Zeeland oysters for the first time, the smallest and most succulent oysters in the world. I spent hours after dinner gazing out of the window of the "Trianon" watching the passing crowd. One of them, a wild-eyed man, obviously desperate through want, kept on fingering something in his pocket which in the United States would certainly have been a gun. With a wry smile he hesitated whether to shoot me or himself. He went away, sidled over to the Municipal Theatre where they were performing Behrman's *Biography*, sidled back, smiled so disarmingly again that it was only my ignorance of Dutch that prevented me from going out to talk to him. He once more fingered his pocket nervously. The poor devil was at his last extremity, but no passer-by took the slightest notice of him, nor did he try to beg at all.

On Monday morning I visited the Municipal Museum to see the loan exhibition of the Morris brothers which struck me as heavily and conventionally Victorian, and the permanent magnificent collection of Van Goghs, whose early Dutch landscapes show such fine promise. A room is devoted to each geographical period of his development, San Remy, Anvers, and Arles each having one. I was immensely struck with the vigour and originality of the ultra moderns who are savage in their hatred of modern life, guying humanity fiercely and accentuating its grotesque ugliness. Adrian Timmer, however, had three lovely little examples of still life, full of the old spirit of devotion to detail. One in particular of three old books and a candle on a table was lovely.

Just when I was about to leave Amsterdam I discovered the Cokin where all the big antique shops are. But I had to go on to Haarlem for my next lecture. In my hotel here, the "Lion D'Or," the officers of the conscript army in Royal Air Force blue were billeted, elderly but jovial. Haarlem's glory is its Groote Market, a square that surrounds its lofty cathedral into the base of which are built little shops. Here were many antique shops full of Dutch silver and blue Delft tiles.

I was taken for a drive through the Blumendaal, the home of the rich Amsterdam merchants, a sandy, hilly, pine country of big houses among trees. One road runs through the dunes to the sea at Zandsvoort, where are extensive sands, but barbed wire prevents you from reaching them except at specified places. The sea was steel grey under a grey mist through which peered an orange ball of sun. The famous seaside resort was full of hotels with the shutters up. It looked exactly like Cleveleys or Norbreck in the dead season.

My next excursion was across Holland to the German border at Enschede, the centre of the depressed cotton-mill area. This entailed a wait at Amsterdam where I noticed for the first time how artistic are the pictures in the waiting-rooms, where by the way you are also provided with newspapers and facilities for getting drinks and food.

After Deventer the train slowed down as we came to one place of chimneys after another, culminating in Almelo, Hengelo, and ultimately Enschede, where I was met by a most charming English woman married to a Dutch cotton-mill owner. Her house stood back from the road in a park and we were greeted by the screeching of peacocks, by the fluttering of white doves and the caresses of a dachshund. After the lecture a large dinner party was held in our honour, and I met a most entertaining and unexpectedly virile young Dutchman who had studied cotton conditions in Oldham, and now ran a Drag hunt which met every Saturday and ran over the dyke country. The only other pack of hounds in Holland belongs to the Queen. I was driven the next day by my

hostess over the country that they hunt, a jolly tract of woodland, fields with hedges and broad brooks and occasional farmyards. I was also driven to the German boundary which I felt no particular desire to cross. The main road leading to it still had the Napoleonic avenue of tall beeches, but by its side ran the new, wide arterial road with its side-tracks for cyclists and further tracks for pedestrians. I saw also the new salt-water swimming pool with its electric gadget for creating waves.

As we were driving through Oldenzal two Spanish bull-fighters in rich blues and greens appeared down the village street, smiled and disappeared. It was an odd place to meet one's first matador other than on the stage. I was told that each of these villages holds high revels at Christmas and Shrove Tuesday when everybody dances, but from what I saw of the Dutch they would rather scowl than dance. I was unlucky not to be there for the skating, for then the oldest to the youngest, the prince to the chauffeur, throws off his mask of sullenness and is full of glee and jollity as he skates down the long canals.

I went from Enschede to Deventer, which stands pleasantly on the Ysel, a tributary of the Rhine. We were met by our host, dressed in a short covert coat lined with astrakhan. He too was a miller but in straitened circumstances. Of his three fair daughters only one spoke English well. We spent a strange afternoon looking at books of Dutch Natural History. I was kept going by a glass of gin which did something to allay the pangs brought on by the cold. A wood fire was lit in our honour but not frequently enough replenished. The lecture was the hardest to give of the tour. The boys and girls could understand only a word here and there, and would have become restive if I had given them half a chance. A strange sweet smell crept over the home of my host which Jill attributed to the cooking of horse. I was regaled with a box of old photographs of Finland, Norway and Russia that my host had visited before the War. The next morning he showed me with very great pride his garden of anemones (pronounced by him to rhyme with hormones) snowdrops and aconites.

The next day, our day for sailing home, to my discomfiture the wind rose. Washed clothes flapped wildly on the clothes lines, and the sails of windmills revolved merrily. The station at Amsterdam was full of draughts and blown paper. I spent the afternoon exploring The Hague after a luncheon at the Hotel Dijjers. To my surprise as the afternoon wore on the wind dropped, the moon rose high in a cloudless sky, and at ten o'clock we were in the crowded boat train *en route* for the *Amsterdam*, warmth, comfort, and attractive English faces. The sea was so calm that I did not even know when we docked, and looking out to Harwich in the early morning I could hardly believe that there could exist a country so beautiful as England, a people so lively and so handsome as the English.

I had been away for ten days.

In future I shall go round lecturing in my own country with even more pleasure than before. Colne, Farnworth and Accrington are far more lively than Amsterdam, Haarlem and The Hague.

As the result of these hurried trips through France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Holland, most of all Holland, I am willing to give Europe a miss. It possesses no attraction for me.

(iii) *The United States*

I find more and more as time passes that of all countries in the world the one that I want most of all to see again is the United States.

I did so many things wrong the first time. I had to hurry. Sixteen weeks is wholly inadequate to make a girdle round so vast a country. Nor next time do I propose to spend £975. That I spent so much was partly due to the fact that the dollar's value appreciated from 5.40 on my arrival to 4.75 almost as soon as I arrived. I had to stay in all the most expensive hotels and have a private suite in which to entertain reporters who surged round me in every town only to ask the same maddening question and to receive in the end the same monotonous answer.

It was wholly unnecessary to spend £102 on the steamer ticket. Only the mug need go first-class. It was unnecessary to stay at the St. Regis hotel in New York. There are plenty of good ones not half so expensive.

On my outward journey I only spent a week-end in New York, but I saw the negro city of Haarlem, a baseball match where the spectators drank neat rye whisky at 130 degrees in the shade, a colony of unemployed living in dog-kennels of their own construction on the banks of the Hudson river right under the pent-houses of the millionaires, and I made a voyage right round the granite island of Manhattan to see the glory of the skyscrapers from every angle.

I was immensely taken by the neatness of the gadgets, specially the shutes just outside the bedroom doors in which letters are posted.

I found the geniality of everybody quite staggering. I expected them to shoot anybody who bumped into them from behind in a car, but they always roared with laughter as if driving were a bumping game on a pier. I liked the courtesy of all shop assistants, "Come back and see us again, sometime," the affability of waiters, the gratitude of taxi-drivers, all of whom seemed genuinely glad of an extra dime, the slickness of dancers, the good taste of the girls, the perfect physique of the men, the absence of any maimed or elderly beggars. The only pan-handler I encountered tried to sell me a gardenia on the ground that he was dying of sleeping-sickness. He certainly looked it.

The whole of New York City struck me as a miracle of electrifying efficiency, but nothing surprised me more than the grandeur, cleanliness and quietude of its huge railway-stations. The trains leave from invisible lower platforms. The main station is cathedral-like in loftiness and contains a small town of shops.

My first railway journey was to Washington, a night journey which gave me a chance to wonder at the variety of fare and the exquisite cooking, and also to wonder how men and women contrived to undress in the tiny bunks provided. I did not like the communal

shaving and washing-room, especially as I had not acclimatised myself to the custom of casual spitting. And indeed on all long-distance trains I gave myself the luxury of a private drawing-room which was almost essential in view of the work I had to get through, though it removed me from the familiar intercourse of the other passengers whom I now only met in the observation-car or the dining-room.

Washington is probably the best laid-out city in the world. New York is a city of blocks or cubes arranged in small rectangles. Washington is a city of green trees and shining marble government offices irradiating like the spokes of a wheel from the central hub of the domed Capitol.

My meeting with the President was completely fortuitous. I met a man who told me that if I wished I might accompany him to the Weekly Press Representatives' Conference with the President which took place in the annexe to the White House. After waiting with some seventy Press-men from all the States I saw swing-doors open, and there was a wild Rugger scrum to be first in the smaller room to which it led. This was the President's study. I first saw a man with an enormous cigar prowling up and down outside the windows beyond, presumably a detective. I then saw an enormous man prowling up and down with an enormous cigar inside the room behind the President's chair, presumably another detective.

Finally I saw the President himself seated, square-jawed with twinkling sea-blue eyes, firm shoulders and a most friendly, encouraging manner. He looked like the best type of schoolmaster. The reporters stood surging over his desk, note-books and pencils in their hands exactly like small boys waiting to take down some dictated note from their form-master. Indeed that is what they were about to do. Roosevelt issued an edict about coal. They all took it down, and then in the most genial way he asked if anybody had any questions. They nearly all had, and they were all answered concisely. One man asked whether he had any news about Britain's intentions with regard to the War

Loan. His reply was revelatory. He addressed several of the men by their Christian names. He was a model of affability. Indeed when he dismissed us I expected him to get up.

I didn't know that he was paralysed until I came face to face with him to be introduced. "Mr. President, a Britisher," said my friend, and gripping me warmly the President looked up at me smiling and said "How's grouse?" It was not what I expected. Little that I saw or heard in America was. I instantly became a believer in Roosevelt, and the more I saw of him and the more I heard him the more convinced I was that he was destined to lead America far on the right way to consolidate her many conflicting elements and somehow forge a common American nation. It is unlucky that the politicians are held in such poor esteem and that the law is so incapable of dealing with murder, but we are apt to forget over here how cheap life is to the American. Sometimes I wonder whether we do not hold it too dear over here.

It was a great moment for me to look upon the Potomac river for the first time, and to visit George Washington's house at Mount Vernon and Abraham Lincoln's birthplace in Kentucky. That first long drive from Washington down to James Town will long remain in my mind. It was my first introduction to creek and swamp and the land where the first settler John Smith met Pocahontas and had to make terms with the Indians. It is the land of Williamsburg where the reconstruction of eighteenth-century domestic architecture has been admirably done. It is the land of great deeds in the Civil War, and everywhere are plaques and commemorative tablets. Every highway has its memories of historic engagements.

How lovely are the colonial houses of Kentucky and Virginia with their cool porticoes, tall pillars, wooden frames and square dignity.

One of the oddest places I passed in this area was Shaker Town, the village of celibates, where each house has two partitions, a door for the men and another door

for the women. It was startling in Harrodsburg to see the wooden stockade still as it was when it was held against the Indians by Daniel Boone.

I was taken from Lexington to see the Mammoth Caves where you can apparently walk for days underground. We picked up a sightless crayfish in a subterranean lake, but after pickling it, I had to throw it away. On this occasion we ran out of petrol at night and the driver left us on a mountain road to listen to jackals and mountain lions, but it was hold-up men that the driver's wife was afraid of. Apparently any car that isn't in motion in America is in danger. She got as far as hiding her rings behind the seat before her husband returned.

From Lexington we crossed Georgia in a heat-wave to get to Jacksonville in Florida, and I knew what real heat was for the first time in my life. I began to understand why niggers prefer a life of eating water-melons and fishing from a boat in the intervals of cotton picking to the more lucrative and strenuous life of a Pullman attendant. The South is a golden lotus-land where life is just lazed away.

I got a queer sensation as I crossed the Swanee River for the first time in my life. I couldn't believe before that it really existed. At Jacksonville I heard the lovely song of the mocking bird in the square below my hotel bedroom window, and men in their shirt-sleeves sat out of doors cooling down at midnight. The next day the Mayor of Jacksonville took me off to buy my first tropical suit. I needed it. Then I was taken to see my first jungle, and as if by prearrangement, an alligator darted across the road in front of the car and kindly waited while my driver prodded it in the jaws with a bamboo. I never saw an American afraid of anything except hold-ups and kidnapping.

I bathed in a quite hot Atlantic from Daytona Beach. I gave Miami a miss, and went to the old Spanish fort of St. Augustine, a place of oleander and hibiscus and grey Spanish moss in every hedge. It boasts several houses which claim to be the oldest in America.

So I came to the Mississippi and thought of Huckleberry Finn and Mark Twain as I gazed down into its dirty yellow sluggish waters. And what an astonishing sight is a sea full of wild hyacinths drifting by.

When I go back to America I mean to make a bee-line for the South where the tempo, after the flurry and fluster of modernity, will be very soothing. As a sun-worshipper I feel that I should be happy to settle down for the rest of my life in some lazy Southern state. It was glorious to bathe from Daytona Beach in water that seemed to have been specially heated. It was pleasant all along the Gulf of Mexico to watch the coloured people sucking their water-melons and fishing from their boats.

And what a colourful country is the bayou country beyond the levees of New Orleans where the Cajan trappers paddle up and down in their pirogues full of Spanish moss or skins or oysters, the Acadians chatter their queer French patois in the rice-fields, and the negroes sing in the sugar and cotton plantations.

I happened to be in New Orleans for the arrival of Hagenbeck's five-ring circus and joined them at breakfast at five o'clock in the morning, the artistes going to one end of a huge marquee distinguished by tablecloths, and the attendants going to the other end where there were no tablecloths. It was in New Orleans that I was first given gin fizz as only Ramos can make it. It is unlike any other drink in the world, more quickly revivifying and more delicious to the taste. It was in New Orleans that I first ate Creole dishes, gumbo made of oysters, shrimps and chicken, and *bouillabasse* better than any I ever tasted in France. In the negro chapel I saw the coloured people give their interpretation of a morality play called *Heaven Bound*, which gave me a quicker insight into negro mentality than anything that I have seen before or since. There was a most realistic Devil continually darting out of Hell to tempt each Pilgrim as he or she journeyed alone down the aisle seeking the Golden Gate. He tempted them with cigarettes, copies of *Vogue*, whisky, dice, a guide to

auction bridge, lottery tickets, a chicken and a kiss-proof lip-stick. Only three out of twenty fell to his wiles. The singing was, like all negro singing, soul-stirring, and the acting a religious rite.

When I got out to Avery Island where Mr. MacIlhinny grows his tabasco pepper on top of the salt-mines, I was shown some of the treasures of his private botanical gardens, the largest in the world. He showed me a sacred orange-tree of Japan given him by the Emperor and he introduced me to my first bear. But the loveliest sight was at sundown when I saw snow-shower upon snow-shower of homing egrets float out of the sky, and among them, like one devil in a world of saints, stood the black anhinga, the most primitive bird in the world. It is almost a reptile with claws for climbing trees and a long neck like a cormorant.

It was in New Orleans that I saw my first game of American football, and was instantly converted. It is faster than Rugger, fiercer than Rugger, and much more exciting to watch. What a treat it was to see a game in which every kick was perfectly timed, every tackle brought its man down, and no pass was dropped. The spectators are nearly as pleasant to watch as the game. The girls dress in Ascot frocks, are led by a cheer-leader, go nearly frenzied with delight or dismay and drink coca-cola and eat peanuts. American football is of course purely an amateur game and only played by the schools and universities.

I was very sorry to leave New Orleans. The Texan prairie, in spite of its Texan blue-bonnets and cowboys in Sixteen-Gallon Stetsons propping up doorways littered with turkeys, was pretty tame. But San Antonio was anything but tame. It glowed and glittered like a city of old Saville. The spirit of "O. Henry," who magically interpreted its elusive romantic quality, still permeated it. I wish I had stayed longer, but I suddenly became afraid that I wasn't cramming enough into my week, so I dashed on in the "Sunset Limited" (what a lovely name for a train) to El Paso where the wind was cold and rain was falling into the waters of the Rio Grande.

My experience of Mexico was short. I had just time to be made a Member of the I.B.F., and buy a pair of silver inlaid spurs before starting northward on my first long-distance motor-bus drive. We drove for 370 miles and a small baby was sick all the way. We passed rich green fields of alfalfa, the rose-tinted, lemon yellow, inky black organ pipes of the Organ Mountains, red Chili peppers drying outside lost log cabins, cowboys rounding up herds of cattle in blinding storms, and so eventually passed out of the desert to Santa Fé, where it was snowing. The next day I discarded the tropical suit that I had bought in Florida and encased myself in lamb's wool. I was now in the land of the Red Indians who live in yellow Spanish flat-roofed adobe houses of clay and straw.

I liked everybody I met in America except the Indians. Their hands were clammy, their manners surly, and expressions hang-dog. They charged seventy-five cents for having their photographs taken, followed you from house to house trying to make you buy pottery and rugs and water-colours, but all the time making sure that you would not penetrate their secret Khiva, or temple distinguished by sloping poles. Indians stood like Arab sentinels gazing out over the mountains where they look for Montezuma and the trails that lead to the sacred fire that is relit every fifty-two years. This is a strange land, for there is a devout order called the Penitentes who perform the most savage arts of self-flagellation in Holy Week to mark the Passion and Crucifixion of Our Lord, lashing themselves with cactus and walking barefoot on flints. When a house contains a marriageable daughter its doors and windows are painted bright blue to advertise the fact.

And this is the land of the Grand Canyon, to me the mightiest wonder of the world. All night long we had climbed along the New Mexican desert in the train and at 7.30 the next morning I found myself on a vast wooden plateau seven thousand feet up looking down into a new world. First I looked across this ten-mile broad chasm to where the trees began again and the air was so clear that I felt that I could throw a stone over to the other

side with ease. The air was so clear that blood-red mountains 15,000 feet high two hundred miles away were visible. But in the end it was downward that I looked, first on to a vast relief map of red far, far below me. These mountain-tops were shaped like temples and battleships and crocodiles and ducks and pagodas. The top layers were light grey slabs of limestone, then came grey sandstone, red shale and red sandstone. These form the great towers and temples. Below this comes a great wall of limestone stained red from the sandstone. Below again is green shale and granite, and at the bottom stand the oldest rocks in all the world, jet-black. Here for once we are privileged to see billions of years in a moment of time, and this, we are told, is only one-twelfth of the erosion caused by the tiny inoffensive-looking Colorado River that from this distance, 7000 feet above, looks like an unhedged mountain track, a ribbon of sand. Then one detects ribs in this ribbon, and these are the rapids, of which there are three hundred, the waves rising to fifteen feet, and the speed to about thirty miles an hour. From above you would swear the water was not moving. The canyon is 217 miles long and to cross it by train you have to travel 1000 miles. You can cross it by mule track in thirteen miles and you can of course fly over it. Only ten people in the world's history have ever got through the Grand Canyon alive. Nine pioneers under a one-armed Civil War veteran and an artist got through in four canoes in 1869.

Close by is the Painted Desert where the whole place looks like the sky at sunset turned upside down. It was here that I first heard cowboys sing and saw Indians dance. And from the Grand Canyon I returned to the sunny hot plains of Phoenix, Arizona, a place of dates, oranges, figs and cantaloups in endless profusion, a simple-minded city of extraordinary peace and charm right in the middle of the desert. Here I met the giant cactus and many rattlesnakes and intense heat, and felt an almost irresistible desire to penetrate the lonely rocky fastness of Superstition Mountain, surely one of the most desolate peaks in the world.

I could not believe that the world contained so much beauty as was now being poured out so lavishly on every side of me. I was not, for instance, at all prepared for those high Sierra Madre Mountains that stand above Los Angeles. No wonder that this is the spiritual home of films. All the loveliest types of world scenery crowd round the doors of Hollywood studios. These studios are guarded much more closely than our prisons, and I felt little temptation to penetrate them. I saw Katherine Hepburn hard at work rehearsing a play and Francis Lederer go over and over again a scene that didn't seem worth doing once. My mind was still dwelling on the blood-red loveliness of the Arizona mountains.

The houses in which the film stars live in the Beverley Hills seemed to me more interesting than the stars themselves, and even these have to be guarded night and day against the kidnapper and marauder.

A far more profitable place is the California Technical College over which Dr. Milliken took me, and showed me the model of the new telescope which is to have a diameter of two hundred inches, enabling us to see a billion light-years away. That seemed to be very fitting after the Grand Canyon. His own contribution is the splitting of the nucleus of the atom by the impact of a cosmic ray, releasing a billion volts of energy. It was Dr. Milliken who took me over the Huntington Library where hang the loveliest pictures ever painted by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Romney and Lawrence, while among the books are the most precious manuscripts in English, four first folio Shakespeares and the Ellesmere Chaucer, open to any research student from any part of the world.

At San Francisco I felt as if I were back in England, but that may have been due to the fog. No city in England is set so steeply on so many hills; not even Bath, Buxton or Matlock. But it reminds you equally of China, Russia, Japan, France and Italy. It is the most cosmopolitan city in the world, and one of the most romantic. Barbary Coast still stands in spite of seven fires and an appalling earthquake. But it is as the first

port on the Pacific that San Francisco's water-front is so entrancing. But there are other things that I shall not soon forget about San Francisco, the stranger who tackled me as soon as I had finished broadcasting and challenged me to a game of chess in the public park, the sight of a Chinaman carrying a basket of live wild-cats, the sight of men playing cricket next door to a field of bison, the astonishing and totally unexpected presentation to me of the golden key of the city. I am not sure whether this carries with it the freedom of the city, but I am as proud of it as if it did. And it was in San Francisco that I met Mr. Gump who showed me the most marvellous collection of jade in the world, and John MacLaren, the creator of the Golden Gate Park who in offering me whisky said: "The only decent thing a Scot can do in offering an Englishman whisky is to offer him the bottle and turn his back." In his Park he has planted a special garden with every flower mentioned in Shakespeare.

The lynching that happened at San Francisco while I was there was peculiarly revolting. A twenty-two-year-old boy called Brooke Hart was kidnapped by two men outside his father's office and taken to the San Matteo bridge in San Francisco Bay, where they crushed his head in with a brick and threw his body into the water. Unluckily for the kidnappers they were caught, and the inhabitants, infuriated at the law's delays, rushed the prison, took out the murderers, tore them limb from limb, and hanged what was left from a tree.

I travelled through the forests of gigantic red-woods to beard the poet Robinson Jeffers in his granite cottage at Monterey, and had to disregard a notice: "Not At Home," and an unpleasant bull-dog. It was worth while however for I caught the poet in riding-breeches reading Thomas Hardy aloud to his children.

After San Francisco I went up to the north-west frontier to Seattle where I found cows being milked to tunes on the radio, which appeared to soothe them, and met a bull called Matdaor Masterpiece who weighed a ton and a quarter. It took me about ten minutes to walk round him. He looked more like a battleship than a bull.

I went up to the Cascade Mountains to see the great trees come down to the lumber-mills, and had dinner with the lumber-men who wear red Tyrolean hats and earn from thirty to forty cents an hour, working thirty hours a week.

I was surprised to find a University of ten thousand undergraduates at Seattle. One of the most brilliant girl undergraduates stoked furnaces in her freshman year, and I found a Doctor of Philosophy washing plates in a local restaurant to pay his fees. I dined with the Kappa Kappa Gamma Society of fifty girl undergraduates who gave me a very good idea of the simplicity, vitality, mental alertness, physical fitness, and spiritual rightness of the modern American girl. They were all extremely good to look at. They sang songs of loyalty to their Society at intervals during dinner, and afterwards in the drawing-room bombarded me with questions about England. They then told me their plans for their Christmas vacation. They were nearly all going off into the mountains ski-ing, shooting, fishing and flying. I found that they all flew. It struck me that they had achieved poise without sophistication, a rare and admirable trait. What I do not understand is what happens to this adorable type of American girl when she marries. She retains her loveliness, but her poise becomes too accentuated. She takes command where she should be a partner.

My broadcast talk from Seattle was partly lost in England owing to the failure of control to get the right wave-length, but some of it must have come over because the *Manchester Guardian* commented on my mentioning the smell of the wood in the Snoqualmie lumber-camp.

I got very tired of the two-thousand-mile trip from Seattle to Minneapolis, though it was a pleasant variety to cover seventy miles on the footplate of the engine, a windy, cold, dirty, shaky, but not otherwise exciting sensation. We climbed five thousand feet up to Anaconda, the largest smelter, and later looked across to the million sparkling diamond lights of Butte, the largest

mining camp in the world. At the Homestake Pass we crossed the Great Divide. Then came the petrified forests known as the Bad Lands, and later the fertile prairie with its isolated white wooden tiny-spired churches, and so eventually I came back to the Mississippi at Minneapolis, a city of hundreds of lakes and lagoons, peopled almost entirely by Scandinavians. I watched flour being ground and crushed and separated on one side of the river before crossing to the older twin city of St. Paul, where I attended the trial of the gangster Tuohy, and had machine-guns turned on me as I entered the court to prevent me from attempting a rescue.

At Chicago I was first surprised by looking out on what I took to be a sea. As Lake Erie is over sixty miles across it is to all intents and purposes on the sea. Next I was entranced by the beauty and wealth of Michigan Avenue, perhaps the finest street in the world. But just behind the lovely avenue are quite revolting slums. On the other hand the Loop, in which stands the great store of Marshall Field, the largest shop in the world, and the Merchandise Mart the largest public office in the world, keep up the high standard set by Michigan Avenue. There are large and handsome houses in Forest Drive, and all along the water-front are museums and art galleries of astonishing variety and interest, but there are miles and miles of mean streets in Chicago as I realised from the railway carriage window and on my visit to the Juvenile delinquents' court. Here I saw a young Italian brought up on a charge of throwing a tomato at his teacher. He was accompanied by as evil a contingent of "Wops" as you could imagine. I cannot think that the cream of Italy's aristocracy migrated to Chicago.

The University of Chicago is presided over by a very able unacademic scholar called Hutchins, the son of the President of Berea, who, on hearing that I was going to dine in college, pulled out a dollar and said: "Go, get yourself a decent meal outside, and preserve your good impression." I had heard a sermon in the University chapel in which the preacher had told his

congregation to model themselves upon the youth of Germany, the youth of Italy, and the youth of Russia. England, I frequently discovered, was regarded as practically dead.

I watched the brokers in the Chicago wheat-pit shouting and gesticulating with all the vehemence and fury of bookies at the Derby. I was taken to a most all the favourite radio-announcers and entertainers thrilling ice-hockey match, and an entertainment at which appeared in person, and were greeted with as much enthusiasm as if they had been Colonel Lindbergh himself. I watched a Ford car being built in an hour in the Detroit factory, which was turning out 1200 new cars every day, and as a pleasant contrast, went on to watch the Swedish sculptor Carl Milles working away at the model of his titanic Indian smoking a pipe of peace, in the peaceful and lovely college of Cranbrook where girls and boys are brought up in an atmosphere very different from that of Detroit. But quite the most astonishing thing about this industrial city was the street in which I counted a hundred churches, among them the Shrine of the Little Flower, presided over by the broadcasting political Catholic priest, Father Coughlin, whose fan-mail has to be delivered in trucks.

I was disappointed in Niagara in spite of the length of the icicles. It is more impressive seen from the Canadian side. But Schenectady more than made up for it, for here I met Dr. Irving Langmuir, the inventor of the modern gas-filled lamp, Dr. Coolidge, who perfected the method for drawing Tungsten into wire, and Dr. Whitney, who is in charge of G.E.C. research. In their presence I saw many marvels. I heard music produced by rays of light. I saw a door open automatically. I saw the powerful effect of an undetected speck of radium on an electric detector.

In Boston I was surprised to find a modern industrial city, but in the country round I found enchantment, specially in Concord, the home of Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau and Louisa Alcott, and in Salem, where I saw the House of the Seven Gables and the portraits of the

thin-lipped Puritans who burnt the witches. I met in Salem two old maiden ladies with a buggy and a cat who might have stepped straight out of *Cranford*.

Boston's great glory is, of course, the University of Harvard, which bears a strong likeness to Clare, and has indeed a strong affinity with the University of Cambridge. I was delighted to find that an ancestor of mine had been pastor of the old North Church in 1675.

And so I came back to New York in very different weather from that which I had experienced in September, for now the electric light switches gave me a shock as I pressed them, whiffs of white steam rose from all the centrally heated apartments, cars were left completely covered by snow in Fifth Avenue, men lay dying of cold in Central Park, luckier men and women skated themselves warm in the same park, while boys and girls roller-skated down the main street-walks.

I met Anne Morgan, who took me over the American Women's Club, a grand communal centre for all business-women. After celebrating Christmas by listening to King George's broadcast, and drinking his health in Californian champagne, standing up solemnly and alone in the St. Regis hotel dining-room, I saw the New Year in, gave a final broadcast to the American nation on England and sailed for home on 4th January, 1934, satisfied if only for the letter which ran: "Your mission to America strikes me as the most important enterprise ever undertaken by the B.B.C., and they are to be congratulated upon their penetration in selecting a man of your high qualification for the extraordinary task. I know of no other Briton who would not have made a mess of it, either by an ingrowing mind or by club-feet."

And now I'm waiting to go back. There is no country in the world which I have so strong a desire to revisit as the United States.

Chapter XV

HUNTING

“All the best things in life are free.”

“Happiness consists in never being indoors for luncheon.”

WHEN the approach of the Armada was at last announced, Sir Francis Drake decided to continue his game of bowls. When I was told that the Air Commodore of Cranwell wanted to see me on a matter of great personal importance, I was on my way to the meet. I decided to hunt. I believe it lost me my job. And yet if similar circumstances were to arise again I should again decide to hunt.

I find it astonishingly hard to explain why. I have just come home after a Boxing Day hunt. I feel just twenty times the man I did before I set out. Why?

It was a miserable day, grey, dark, damp, the whole land almost completely enveloped in fog and a light, thin, but very wetting drizzle. I was late for the meet as always happens on Boxing Day, for the trains to Horsham are infrequent. I found most of the crowd coming away or standing idly at the corners of Carfax, ready enough, however, to be ribald at the expense of a hustling figure in deer-stalker, scarlet scarf, cowboy reefer, whipcord riding-breeches, gaiters and heavy boots.

But what did I care for ribaldry? I ran down the long line of stationary cars, past the cemetery and the sewage farm, on to the wet fields where no cars could come and the foot-followers were beginning to straggle out.

“One lot go home, one lot stand in the market-place, one lot keep to the railway-line. We’re shedding them by degrees,” I said to my companion.

A sound through the mist of hounds in full cry led us down to the winding Arun, and on the wooded slopes

opposite we saw an army of foot-followers, a few horse-men and the hounds.

We ran up and down the bank looking for some bridge. There were slippery tree-trunks, but I had no wish to swim.

Hounds ran to and fro, always hot on the scent, but the fox was in no hurry to leave a covert which was so well lined with howling humanity.

When we eventually found a crossing, we saw the fox so hotly pursued that he seemed to be almost in the jaws of the foremost pursuing hound, and soon we heard the triumphant "Whoop" of the huntsman proving that his run was over.

In my endeavour to get back to the field I elected to cross the river by a very slimy and slippery drain-pipe. When I was half-way over the Master, sighting me, gave another "Whoop" in the hope that it would cause me to fall in.

The brush was thrown into the air for the foot-following mob to scramble for, and the result was like Westminster School on "pancake greeze" day.

This fox eaten, we wandered over the mist-covered field to Shelley Wood, where immediately another fox was found. Scent was obviously very good, for I never heard hounds give tongue more hotly. Up and down the wood they ran, and at last the fox broke on the only side which wasn't car-ridden and took sanctuary in a ditch just over the brow of a hill. A wait of ten minutes followed while the terrier was fetched. As soon as he was put in the fox bolted, the army of foot-people put up a cry that would have pleased Chaucer, and to my surprise no sooner had he covered a couple of fields than he turned back without being headed, straight into the jaws of the pack.

More "Whoops," more tearing of limb from limb by fighting hounds, more scrambles for a brush, and off we went again for Muntham.

I started for home. There were only two trains from Christ's Hospital, 2.18 and 4.18. I felt the need of a bath and a drink.

In the train my only other companion was a little thin-nosed man who told me that he worked on the railway.

"But I was a groom for twenty years, and when I see 'hound or hear horn I just can't help myself. I've just to get up and go. I've got to follow. It's something stronger than what I am and I can't refuse."

Well, here I am at home, clean and, I hope, in my right mind, glowing after my very hot bath and fresh warm clothes, and I feel at peace with all the world, if not very much inclined to write.

But this seems a good opportunity while I am feeling so good to try to explain what it is that hunting does for me.

This Boxing Day hunt may well serve as an example. It was a most depressing day. If I had not had the incentive of the Meet I should certainly have spent the day indoors and worked, "grouching" because I wasn't getting the exercise that is so essential to my well-being.

It was too wet to play tennis. I have long ago given up golf. It was too dismal to walk without an objective. It was, indeed, the very worst sort of day for a holiday.

I felt it all the more because the previous day, Christmas, had been hot and cloudless, the sun shining so brightly out of a clear blue sky, that I lay on the beach all the morning listening to the shore larks. I very nearly bathed.

Hunting best suits the English landscape. It also best suits the English climate. Once I had started to follow hounds I entirely forgot the rain.

An enormous number of English people have now become so urbanised that they treat the country-side as they treat their seaside, as a place to be visited only in the height of summer.

Hunting reveals three other seasons at least as pleasurable.

First, there is the beginning of the cub-hunting season. Just as hunting gets you out of doors at times of the year when you would otherwise stay in, so does it get you out of bed when normally you would be in bed.

Many of us believe that the best time of day and the best time of the year is at five or six o'clock on a September morning, when the harvest moon hangs white and immense out of a steel-coloured sky, and the white mists cling round the yellow stooks of corn and lights twinkle from a few cottage windows. All the world but us is at rest.

We are not at rest, for we are taking the first freshness of the morning, ankle-deep in a dew that limns the millions of spiders' webs in the hedgerows with glittering, feathery, rainbow-hued polygons of infinite if evanescent and frail beauty.

The early riser always feels a sense of virtue, but he also feels a sense of pity that there should be so many hundreds of thousands of Englishmen now abed to count themselves accursed they were not here. No appetite for breakfast is ever so prodigious as that whetted by three hours' strenuous cub-hunting.

And you are home, the day's exercise over, before the rest of mankind has settled down to the day's work.

The second season of the year that the urbanised Englishman misses is that of late autumn when fox-hunting proper starts, and some trees stand in the startling grandeur of pure nakedness, while others in russet mantle clad preserve precarious hold on their last batch of golden leaves.

Underfoot our way is carpeted with thickly piled leaves which provide a curiously sensuous delight to shuffle through. The going is perfect, because the winter rains have not yet made the fields sodden. There is a crisp tang in the air. There are still a few blackberries on the bushes. The gorse is in full bloom. There are hazel nuts in the hedges.

The third season is in the spring of the year when the days begin to lengthen, the earth to stretch herself anew and rouse herself from her winter sleep. The birds are everywhere mating. The fields are full of new-born, frisking, crying lambs. The woods are seas of white

foam where the anemones grow and oceans of deep blue where the bluebells bloom.

The hedgerows are in bud again. There are catkins, palm, primroses and violets, celandines and snowdrops, and before hunting stops you will pick your first cowslip, see your first swallow, and hear the cuckoo for the first time in the year.

The hunting man is the only man to be in at the death of the fox. He is also the only man to be in at the birth of the spring.

The man who knows England only in the summer knows a very lovely land, but he knows only a tiny fraction of the variety of that loveliness.

I am astonishingly ignorant of its many-sidedness, but what I have learnt of my country I have learnt mainly by following hounds on foot.

It may well be asked "Why on foot? How can the foot-follower see anything or get any of the thrill of the chase?"

I do not pretend that the foot-follower gets the same thrill as the rider to hounds.

Listen to Miss J. R. Young. "Certainly for pure physical exhilaration, there is little to touch a good run over a fly country, and wind singing in your ears, fence after fence slipping easily away beneath you, and the music of the racing pack making a side accompaniment to the thud of hooves on the grass."

So many good sportsmen have died in the saddle that I am convinced that there are few better ways of living or of dying than riding to hounds.

It just so happens that I have not the money to ride to hounds nor the ability in riding to take fences as fences should be taken if one is to get this "pure physical exhilaration."

But because one is debarred by money, training or physical courage from enjoying the highest physical pleasure known to man there is surely no reason why one should not sing the praises of the second best.

What I wish to make plain is that the foot-follower to hounds shares all the pleasures but the highest. Indeed, he partakes of some that are hidden from the rider.

The rider cannot, except in imagination, know what it feels like to run until you are so exhausted that death would be welcome. A fox does, and certain foot-followers have gone as near to it as makes no matter. The foot-follower, like most onlookers, sees most of the game. After all, he stands behind and sees the whole of it in true perspective. The rider is in the middle of it and can only relate his own horse to that of his nearest neighbour.

I am, moreover, a man of very limited intelligence, and I cannot take in more than one thing at a time, and there are so many things to be appreciated in the hunting-field that if I were on a horse I should have no eyes or mind or ears or (for the matter of that) nose for anything else.

Here are the things that I have time for when I follow on foot.

First, there is the dressing in the early morning.

I agree that I should prefer to be preparing for this great ritual by putting on a pink hunting coat, top-hat, white breeches and the correct type of stiff stock and riding-boots with the white tops, but even the foot-follower has a certain ritual of his own in clothes. The first business is to wear clothes that will keep me warm and dry, sound waterproof boots (never shoes), leggings, riding-breeches, corduroy coat, a woollen pull-over, and of course my deer-stalker. I also take a fleeced-lined cowboy's reefer.

Most followers prefer to travel light. I prefer never to get cold.

Secondly comes the business of food. I have given up the drinking-flask, but if you must have one fill it with cherry-brandy.

I carry a workman's red handkerchief filled with apples, bananas, two hard-boiled eggs and a very little bread and butter.

I eat this as soon as I get in the train or bus that takes me to the meet.

I try to arrive at the meet at least half an hour before the advertised time. It gives me a chance for a drink and a talk in the public bar about the prevalence and where-

abouts of foxes, unreliable gossip I know, but sometimes true words slip out even in a public bar, and anyway the other drinkers are men after my own heart, men of stout heart, country-bred, kindly, knowledgeable about the things that I want to know about. And as soon as hounds arrive I contrive to be near so that I may try once more to get the name of a single one right.

There was a time when every regular rider to hounds knew each hound by name and voice and trick. That day has passed. The hounds are known individually only to those who have walked them as puppies, and taken the trouble to visit the kennels on Sundays and other non-hunting days. I like immensely all the bustle and preparation for the meet, the buttoning on of aprons, taking horses out of the loose boxes, the arrival of the monstrous regiment of motor cars, the greetings of friends, the grave salute to the Master as he comes riding up, his semi-private conversation with the farmers over whose land he is to ride.

I always want this preliminary pageantry to last a little longer than it does. The grouping of the horses, hounds, village-folk, riders, in the village street or, better still, on the lawn of the country house, is one of the most pleasing of English sights.

It is hard each time you see it to resist saying "How like an old print."

For that is the truth of it. This casual grouping recaptures something of a lost England for which in our hearts we all pine. It is part of a lost legend, part of a lost beauty, like a snatch of old half-remembered music or a sudden wry smile that reminds you instantly of a moment of childhood that you thought had been finally erased from the tablets of your memory.

But like these half-remembered snatches the cavalcade moves on before you have time to make the picture indelible.

Luckily your whole day is going to be a succession of these lovely glimpses into a golden world.

There is the actual moving off, the actual music of the phrase, "Hounds gentlemen, please," the first sounding

of the horn, all calculated to stir the blood, and start something moving in the heart, the presence of which you may never have suspected.

The very phraseology used is something quite outside ordinary life. It is like listening to a royal proclamation, so odd and yet so familiar are the words, each coloured with a new meaning.

"Hounds, gentlemen, please," is only the preliminary. All through the day you'll hear lovely phrases. The first view holloa: "Go-o-one—Aw-a-a-a-y," "Hounds laid on," "Rambler's speaking to it," "Haark forrard," "Forrard on." Then a whole host of lovely place-names (that you will look for in vain on the ordnance map that I hope you are carrying) will spill themselves from the lips of hedgers and ditchers and ploughmen as you pass panting by asking where they've gone.

But here we are outside the first covert, Moon Wood is it, or Shelley's? Make sure of that. Are hounds put in up-wind or down-wind? Make sure of that. It is usually down-wind for a small covert and up-wind for a large covert. Why? More lovely language: "Leu-in there, leu-leu-leu. Try for him. Try for him." A crackling of twigs, a rushing through undergrowth, a silence, a whimper, Boisterous scents him, two hounds join, the whole pack gives tongue. They race unseen up the whole wood, down the whole wood. The field stand silent at one corner, the whip in pink at another. Suddenly he lifts his hunting-cap above his head.

Charles James has broken. "Charlie's away." Somebody sees him stealing down the hedge-side and rises in the air screeching. That is a magpie. Every bird and animal seems anxious to betray the way that the fox passes. You and I watch his lovely long lithe red swiftness skim over the open field transfixed with delight. With what grace and ease he races away. Suddenly the horn is blown, hounds break from the covert, and race almost in single file down the hedgerow side, and the field splay out, thundering over the meadow racing for the hedge, turves shot high in the air by the galloping hooves.

There is so much to see, and you on foot see the whole

of it, for you're going to be last, anyway. You might as well take it all in while it is there in sight to take in.

All too soon the fox has disappeared, but he's a grand sight while he's visible, sweeping diagonally over that field, through that hedge, and then left-handed. Is he running into or away from the wind and why? He'll run into the wind if there's a high gale because otherwise he'll have his brush blown over his back, and he doesn't like that. Otherwise normally he will run down-wind.

Don't move from your vantage ground until you're sure which way he's going to turn, and then you'll be able to cut off a corner to reduce your handicap. Don't forget that it's your two legs and wind against the four legs of fox, hound and horse, whose wind is a good deal better than yours ever will be or has been. So you've got to use your intelligence.

You've watched the fox go out of sight. Now watch the way that hounds pick up the line, and which hounds pick up the line, and which hounds overrun it and give tongue to anything. And note how this giving of tongue varies in depth and volume according to the volume of scent.

Is it a good scenting day? Note down the conditions. If it's hot and sunny it is not a good scenting day. If it's cold and frosty it's not a good scenting day. If it is muggy and damp it ought to be a grand scenting day. But scent isn't as simple as all that.

You'll find no scent at all on an ideal scenting day, and you'll find a roaring scent on a day when you expect no scent at all. This may be due to several causes. The earth has a habit of breathing in and out as you and I do, but this breathing is less regular than ours. Some days when it is breathing in it will absorb all the scent there is. On others it will breathe out all the scent there is to varying heights. If it breathes out up to the breast of a hound it will be a roaring scent, if to the breast of a man there will be no scent. And having watched the fox and the hounds out of sight you have now the opportunity of concentrating on the glorious sight of horses galloping.

Crowds collect every day to see horses racing on the flat. The most exciting incident of the whole sporting year is the horse racing at Aintree in the Grand National, but every day of the week in and around many English villages between November and April you can see sights to knock the Grand National hollow. For here are no prepared jumps. Riders have very quickly to make up their minds to take a line, and away they race for the best places to jump the oxers and hedges and brooks.

You watched them all go, the whole two hundred of them, and the second horsemen as well if you're wise before you start. Then you'll pray that they do not go much where there are roads, for if they do you will be made sick by the smell of the petrol of the fearful car-followers and the fox will be headed by the car-followers, and the hunt will be spoilt by the car-followers.

Whatever ill befalls you don't fall into the last degradation of allowing yourself this too easy triumph of charging up and down the roads to view a kill from a car. There is no excuse for it. The car-follower sees nothing, gets no sport, gets no exercise and is only an insufferable nuisance. Luckily he cares much more for his stomach than the sport and by one o'clock you will have exhausted his patience. He will have gone home to luncheon.

One of the great joys of fox-hunting is that it helps you to overcome this fetish of being indoors during the best hours of a winter's day. The sun and the daylight are both very precious, and particularly so when the sun isn't really up till ten o'clock and goes to bed at four. At such seasons it is utter madness to be under a roof from one o'clock till half-past two when the sun is at its zenith. The time for a meal is after your exercise is over, when the night has fallen. But you may be grateful that car-followers like to be indoors for luncheon, for they are the one blot on an otherwise perfect day. But at the beginning of the day you just have to put up with them just as you have put up with the second horsemen.

And now, as at last you get going yourself, you will

see why foot-followers are encouraged in most hunts. There are hunts where they are not popular. The South Down is one of these.

I was one day standing still as a stone watching a hedge bottom which I had every reason to know might be the way of the fox, for I had seen him take this track before and foxes are conservative in their ways. They like to take tracks that are to them as well known as the Great North Road is to us.

But on this occasion he didn't come.

Later the Master, Arthur Dalgety, who hunts noisily, came roaring up. "Hi—you! Have you seen the fox?"

"No fox has passed here," I said, "I've been here twenty minutes."

"That's all you know," he shouted. "Just because you haven't seen the fox it doesn't mean that the fox hasn't seen you." Which was tantamount to saying that I had headed it.

But in the Crawley and Horsham country, with whom I now hunt regularly, foot-followers are regarded as helpful, as indeed they can be. For you and I are now in the rear of the hunt. The fox has passed out of sight, the hounds out of sight and out of hearing, the field have galloped away, and all the world is still. You would never have thought that the hunt had been that way were it not for two things, the churned-up grass where the hooves have passed, and you use these as clues in the detective story you are about to unravel, and the open gates which have been left to you to shut.

In the excitement of the chase the mounted field forget the tendency of cattle to pass through open gates and stray. The second horsemen are too busy gossiping. So they are left to the foot-follower. It is left to the lonely foot-follower more often than not to see a much thinner bedraggled form come racing back over the fields, and to give a "view-holla" if he feels like it. I never do because I always want the fox to get away, which he does seven or eight times out of ten in our country. But I can reclaim riderless horses and restore them to the thrown, I can open gates for the field to pass through,

I can sometimes guide stragglers on to the chase or back home from it, though it is strange how quickly familiar country becomes unfamiliar when approached from an unaccustomed angle.

In point of fact you ought to carry not only an ordnance map but a note-book, and jot down in it the way that the fox goes, the direction of the wind and its approximate rate, the sort of scent, the general conditions, the time of finding, the mileage covered and the time and place of each kill.

There is no point in killing oneself to be in at a death, though when I hunted on foot with the Bleakney I thought it dishonourable to cut corners or to fail to be in at any kill, and I usually achieved this at the cost of straining my heart, and going home in a state of such utter exhaustion that I could neither eat nor sleep. Nowadays I jog along at whatever pace best suits, walking a lot and breaking into a trot at intervals, making it a rule never to stop in spite of the apparent impossibility of ever finding them, for it is worth remembering that just as a field of two hundred can vanish into what seems thin air in a couple of minutes they can with equal ease reappear from the air in even less time.

One of the phrases that you will find most comforting and most true about following the fox on foot is the sentence: "They always come back to you." Many is the time that I have turned round on a wet, cold day with the idea of going home, and while I have been walking along disconsolately quite suddenly the whole field have come racing round a bend, and instead of going away from them I have found myself in the very middle of them. The truth is that most hunting days are confined to a space that a walker can easily cover. The thing to remember is to keep going and not to lose heart.

And do not mind missing the kill. It is the unpleasant part of fox-hunting. Presumably foxes have to be kept down or exterminated. If I had the choice between extermination and the chance of life with the risk of being hunted to death, I'd take the chance. Foxes enjoy living all right. You should just see the cubs at play.

But the kill is unpleasant. It is then that one half of Oscar Wilde's famous remark is seen to be true and the other half given the lie. The fox is not uneatable. Hounds fight for every morsel. But one feels that the huntsman in his triumphant "whoop" mood is unspeakable.

Most hunting people never see a kill, scarcely give the killing a second thought, but I find it only a degree worse than the killing of a hare, for which there is no excuse at all, in view of the fact that a hare has no underground sanctuary and does harm to nobody. The fox can get to an earth, and when he reaches it he ought to be given the victory. Digging out is a filthy business, so is bolting from a drain.

On the other hand you have to remember that if a reasonable number of foxes are not killed, no one will blame the farmer who shoots every fox he sees at sight. But it is quite silly to regard fox-hunters as any more bloodthirsty than turkey-eaters at Christmas. Their vice as a rule, if it is a vice, is not bloodthirstiness but illiteracy.

I remember once pointing out a fox to an elderly man riding past. His reply was: "Fox? Fox? I can't see a fox. Damme, man, I can't see to read and I never want to, but I can see a fox, which is a damned sight better than any book. There's no fox."

And that is a quite common type of mentality among fox-hunters. Their libraries contain little beyond Ruff and Surtees. But before condemning them out of hand for not being deeply versed in current literature, it is perhaps as well to remember that what they know they know well. It is, for instance, a fact that the people who really know about animals, who care for them most tenderly, and are most cared for by animals are the same people who spend the greater part of their lives destroying them. Even Jorrocks confesses his great love for the fox in August, and no one is more careful of the preservation of his pheasants than the man who shoots them.

The truth is that the average fox-hunter is a modern

counterpart of Will Wimble. He really knows country craft. He may be ignorant of foreign politics, obtuse about modern art, laconic and terse in his judgment on matters that exercise tea-tables and the newspapers, but on his own subject, the rotation of crops, the behaviour of animals, and the vagaries of the weather, he is entertaining, exhaustive and reliable. He is a man of simple loyalties, a dependable companion, staunch in adversity, ready to come to the help of his friend or his country, holding his life but at a pin's fee.

It is commonly held against hunting that it encourages snobbery. But this is as foolish as the fallacy about hunting being the sport of Kings and the very rich.

It is probably the most democratic sport in existence. It is the only sport I know that provides both the overfed and underfed with what they both search for in vain, healthy sleep. I have met many unemployed who regard the days on which they follow hounds as the only days they count worth living, and I certainly know many wealthy men who take the same view.

The accusation of snobbery is due to the fact that the unmounted have to look up at the man on horseback, and the man who rides looks down on the rest of the world. To be well mounted gives you such a sense of complete satisfaction that you perhaps communicate to the stranger afoot a sense of aloofness, but it is purely illusory.

The fact that the best people happen to hunt has nothing to do with snobbery, but merely means that the best type of Englishmen are the yeomen, the land-owners and the labourers on the farms. They are the stock from which most of us have sprung, and the degeneration (which again has nothing to do with snobbery) is solely due to urbanisation. It isn't possible for an Englishman to live in the city without losing some of his most endearing qualities.

The countryman exiled in the city pines for the open air and thinks that a walk will do. A walk will not do. What he needs is the close contact that his fathers³ knew, and only got by daily association with birds and animals. The walker confined to clearly defined tracks never reaches



Talking cricket on Southwick Green



Hockey and cricket on Southwick Green

the heart of England, and though he doesn't know it, it is because he gets to the heart of England that the hunting man would rather be where he is now than anywhere else in the world. And where is he now?

At this kill where I paused to make this digression. The rain is falling steadily. The bare trees drip. The further hedge is only just visible through the mist. It could scarcely be more depressing, and yet this is the place in which the hunting man would rather be than anywhere else in the world.

His heart is singing, and you can be very sure that it is not blood-lust that is causing this singing. It is as much as anything that he is in the ancient untouched heart of England. I keep on meeting people who claim to know this and that bit of England "like the back of their hand." That is, unwittingly, true, for if they were asked to draw suddenly a map of the back of their hand any anatomist at a first glance would point to a dozen errors. The truth is of course that we do not know the backs of our hands, and that is perhaps no great matter. The fact that we do not know the land that lies in front of our drives is perhaps more reprehensible. There is of course a defence for our ignorance.

We are not generally encouraged to wander at will "thorough brake, thorough brier," down woodland rides and over the plough. It is only when we are chasing the fox that we are made freemen of the English countryside and allowed to wander with impunity in whatever direction we wish, wire or no wire.

It may have been this sense of complete freedom, for I am a great believer in freedom, that first led me to chase the fox on foot. But I rather think there were other factors. There was the hunter's instinct which we all inherit in varying degrees. There was the exercise. I always found cross-country running a dull pursuit, but it was a way of keeping fit when the lack of companions debarred me from games that demanded a team. It was cheap and I had no money.

To ride to hounds may cost you anything. There is the cost of buying and keeping horses, the subscription

to the hunt, the tips, things all quite outside the scope of my purse at any time in my life.

To follow hounds on foot costs nothing. It is the cheapest entertainment on earth. No. That is not quite true. The finest things in life are all free. Sunlight, the wind, the countryside itself. And hunting. It provides an incentive for going on and on that is quite irresistible.

You are in the possession of certain clues and if you work them out properly it means death to your victim, against whom, be it remembered, you bear no more grudge than a stoat bears against the rabbit into whose neck its teeth are fastened. But the chase is really frightfully exciting. You find, the fox breaks. He has a thousand wiles to match yours. Watch him break the continuity of scent by going through that flock of sheep, watch him leap high across that ride, double back and leave the pack over-running, guessing, disappointed and lost. Watch him rouse other foxes to make you change.

Your really stout-hearted fox has the laugh over two hundred human beings, fifteen or sixteen couple of hounds and a whole countryside of watchers. It is your mangy, lousy fox that allows himself to be chopped for whom you may feel sorry, but the weakest certainly goes to the wall in the natural world. The helpless meet with short shrift anywhere.

I started hunting because it was free, because it was exciting, because it gave me violent exercise, and most of all because it showed me England. I resented, as I still resent, the fact that the Derbyshire and Yorkshire grouse-moors are kept from and not for the public. I still resent trespass notices in woods though I can well see the reason for them.

But I know "the bits of places that none but the countryman knows" in most parts of the country, though scarcely with the thoroughness of that foot-follower of the Beaufort who, at the age of forty-eight in the season 1913-1914, covered 2089 miles with them and was in at the deaths of seventy-six foxes. I don't envy him his kills, but I envy him his legs, and he stands

as a lasting confutation of those who say that the foot-follower can never keep up.

It may be that for several miles you have to follow no better trail than indistinct hoof-marks, but your reward is great when you find them again, as you assuredly will if you keep going, and having found them you are likely to stay with them for the rest of the day, for they seldom run away from you twice.

In boyhood I used to follow the High Peak Harriers and Mr. Hart's hounds over the stone-wall country of mid-Derbyshire, and I did this mainly because I liked strenuous exercise.

I did not analyse my feelings very closely, but I should say that I grouped it with bathing and skating and tobogganing, all invigorating, all exciting, and all free.

At Oxford I ran for the first time with beagles. At the "House" we had our own private pack, and I used to get out twice a week in the two winter terms. As hares always run in circles it was possible to see the whole hunt by standing more or less still on a high knoll, but my idea was exercise, the winning of a mask or pad, and so I ran as close on the heels of hounds as possible. I was in very good training, and I used beagling as a preparation for my track and cross-country racing.

I made some good friends with this pack, and I retain fragrant memories of prodigious farmhouse teas and drowsy drives in the drag, jogging along dark lanes on the way back to college.

When I became a master at Sherborne I followed Miss Guest's beagles (she was mounted) until Nowell Smith protested, and the next pack of beagles that I joined was the R.A.F. pack at Cranwell. The hares of Lincolnshire are large, and the dykes broad and deep. It was a wet, exhausting business hunting hares over these broad acres. I remember counting eighty-seven in a single field.

On leaving Cranwell I came to Brighton, and for a few years ran over the Downs and in the Weald with the Brighton Beagles which attracted a queerly cosmopolitan field of fat and thin, old and young, rich and poor.

The Storrington Beagles on the west side of the Adur attract a younger crowd.

But beagling is not to be compared with fox-hunting. There may be an excuse for running a fox to death. There is no excuse whatever for destroying hares. Even in Lincolnshire I used to prefer following the fox on foot to the hare.

And foot-followers were not common with the Blankney. It was a big country and the pace was fast. The legend that foot-followers could not keep up was firmly held. An occasional gig cavorted over the fields, and the car-follower was just beginning to make himself a nuisance. A field-master of cars had to be appointed to prevent a fleet of cars from heading the fox and leading the hounds.

I wish I had kept a strict diary of my year with the Blankney, for I covered vast distances and used to continue to gasp my way along in wind and rain when everything was black before my eyes, when my ears sang as if I were in a funicular, and my heart pumped as if it would break through my skin. It was all extremely silly, but I have been accustomed in my enthusiasm always to overdo everything. You can guess that I began to appreciate a check almost as much as a fox does. At any rate I got to know better than most men what it means to have to go on running when you can scarcely drag one leg in front of another.

When I first went out with the Brighton Beagles I still pursued the same unpleasant habit. I did not enjoy it, but I did get exercise and I thought that exercise was good for me. Without any exercise I am good for nothing. But I went on overdoing it until I strained my heart, and for a long time had to be careful even about walking upstairs.

Then I began going out with the fox-hounds. The colour, the pageantry, the ritual all had me in thrall from the start. In addition there was the movement, the thrill of watching jumps, the crash of falling timber, the huntsman's horn. Something primeval in one's soul answers this call and away we go, following the hoof-

marks, when we can't see them, cutting off corners when we can, over hedge and ditch, through brooks and down green rides, along a route that foxes have often taken before but that has been closed to man for a long time.

We now rediscover the old lost ghostly ways through the woods, we dip into overgrown smugglers' tracks and ways that were old when the Romans came. There are smells that we get nowhere else of dead wet leaves churned up by horses' hoofs, of moss and lichened gates, of dew on the grass, subtle, lovely scents, full and satisfying as the first smell of lilac in spring.

It takes only a minute to get away from the modern world to this lovely lost world, but the car-follower never finds it, the horseman often never notices it, the foot-follower is the only person who really comes wholly under its magic spell.

It is not very easy to define, because although it is introduced by the colour and speed and good fellowship and excitement of the hunt, it really only betrays itself when the hunt has swept past.

You find yourself walking and content to walk, your ears on the alert to hear the sound of horn, but not over-much bothered if the sound (as so often happens) turns out to be that of cockerel, engine-whistle or cow. It sounds absurd in cold blood to pretend that anyone could mistake a hunting-horn for a cow, but I have often done it.

I suppose in a sense it is like golf. Men go out to hit a small ball over some exquisitely shaven green grass and without knowing it fall under a not very dissimilar spell.

You keep going, led by the track of the hoofs, the sound of hounds giving tongue, the information of cottagers that they've "been gone this hour or more," but you are not greatly concerned if you do not meet them again. In point of fact of course you do, because they come back to you.

On the several occasions when I have had to come home early I find that nearly always the fox chooses to come back with me and I find myself in the thick of it all the way home. And if I keep on going they come back to me in the end.

The day is always one of unending variety, for on the one hand you never know what lies round the corner, how dense the wood is, what lovely unexpected houses you are going to chance upon, and on the other there is always the hunt itself, now out of sight and hearing, now tantalisingly just out of reach but in one's hearing, and now right on top of you again just when you had given them up altogether.

When the day is clear of sea-mist I prefer downland hunting to any other, for the going is always good, I can see what they are doing all the time, and the air is keener on the top.

I think perhaps the secret of my enjoyment in hunting lies in the regularity with which I follow hounds. Those who limit their activity in the hunting-field to a bank-holiday meet in a car can scarcely be accounted accredited witnesses either for or against hunting, but it is noticeable that a great number of people whose resources are such that they can afford to live in any country and follow any pursuit, not only elect to ride to hounds in the foulest weather, but to continue to do so three, four and even five days a week, season after season, without ever showing any desire to change their way of living.

I should not describe these keen followers as peculiarly impressionable to natural beauty, but one is liable to be misled by their failure to be articulate. Just as the sight of a clipper ship in full sail excites the emotions of apparently the most imperturbable, so does the sight of hounds in full cry, racing down the hedgerow, or the field splayed out over a couple of fields rouse in almost everybody an ecstatic sensation.

There are many good ways of spending a day of leisure. There is basking in the hot sun on a bathing beach, and cooling off at intervals by a plunge into clear blue water. There is ski-running, but that needs money. There is walking over the downs in spring or autumn. There is mountain-climbing. There is flying. There is riding.

But I keep my riding apart from my hunting. It costs

me five shillings an hour, and I get my gallop over the downs unperturbed by any thought of over-riding hounds. Riding is riding, and hunting's hunting, and so far as I am concerned never the twain shall meet.

But of all forms of exercise that make for my happiness I put following the fox on foot quite easily first. I am content to miss much of the sun, to spend many weary hours in travel deprived of air, and more weary hours in my study deprived of light, if only I may be sure of my autumn and winter Saturdays, when I can tread those sodden places whose names make to me a most heavenly music.

Benton's, Loder's Gorse, Maudlin Barn, Capite, Frenchlands, Copsale, Oakendean, the Kennels, Knepp, Dial Post, Sullington Warren, Rackham Hill, Clapham Wood, Plashetts, Bo-peep, Beanstalk, Roundabouts, Sproxton Thorns, Cocked Hat Spinney, Jolly's Gorse, Parson's Withy-beds, Buttersyke Bar, Hundred Acre Woods, Matching Springs, Chandler's Cross, Dragon's Green, Cuzzicombe Post, Rows Leck, Cocking Causeway, Perrott's Brook, Batcombe Cross, Scugdale Moor Gate, Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Jackament's Bottom, Three Horse Shoes, Six Lane Ends, Scrooby, Robin-a-tip-toe, Cat and Custard Pot, Willoughby Waterless, Barking Fox, Cubley Stoop, Cobbler's Plain.

There's all England in these sweet-sounding place-names.

And as I trudge along the dark lanes at night, wet and tired but blissfully content, I roll over and over on my tongue these names, and each conjures up a fresh scene of loveliness, and it makes no difference whether it's among the loose clitters on a Dartmoor tor or the clitters at the base of the Roman Wall, or the loose limestone of a Derbyshire unmortared wall, whether it is in the soft county of Sussex or the big dyke country of the Lincolnshire fens, it has all been England. Every day has shown me fresh vistas of beauty, and my happiest days have been these days of strenuous if sometimes lost endeavour.

Chapter XVI

CRICKET

I HAVE played cricket ever since I can remember, but never with more enjoyment than in those single-wicket games behind the church at Tansley, where it was "six and out" if you hit the ball over the high wall (because it was such a "sweat" to retrieve it), a "four and out" if you hit the ball into the churchyard, because it was thought to be sacrilegious to chase cricket balls over people's graves. Breaking a window of the church meant immediate abandonment of the game and flight.

At Oxford I played regularly for a side of "rabbits." We drove out to all the surrounding villages in a coach and four, and we all wore grey bowlers. I once scored eighty-seven not out for this team against Eynsham and to commemorate the occasion was presented with a child's bat without a splice that I kept for many years.

I played a good deal at all the schools where I was teaching, and for the R.A.F. while I was at Cranwell, but I never joined the sports club of any newspaper. I rather gathered that they took the game too seriously. But as soon as I went to live at the Hall, Southwick, which faced the village green, I felt once more the urge to play. I did not flatter myself that I was likely to be an asset to the village side, nor was I. After courteously giving me every chance to prove myself worthy of my place in the first eleven I was rightly relegated to the eleventh place in the second eleven, where I have now remained contentedly for about ten years. I have yet to make fifty runs in a season, I do not pretend to bowl, and my only asset still remains my keenness in the field. But we do have fun. We seldom win or lose a match by a margin of more than twenty runs. We have fun in

visiting other Sussex villages, and there is æsthetic delight in playing on the village green at Ringmer that makes the game doubly enjoyable. Being so near Brighton we have of course fixtures with town teams that entail playing in big municipal recreation grounds, and these games are much less enjoyable. The pitches are fiery. There is inadequate room. Four or five other games in progress on the same ground mean constant interruption and some danger. We were, I felt, extremely fortunate in the possession of a village green. It was, I knew, small. The boundaries on two sides were ridiculously near the wickets, but that made fielding at square leg or cover all the more exciting. If you failed to stop the ball it meant a certain four.

Then Southwick grew. A tract of green land that had been used as a trotting-track was wisely acquired as a recreation ground. Unwisely the local council decided to coerce the village cricket eleven to play on it by prohibiting any further matches on the Green, on the flimsy ground that cricket was dangerous for passing traffic.

The recommendation of the Recreation Grounds Committee to the Council was dated 18th January, 1932, and read :

“That in view of the pitches on the Southwick Recreation Ground now being available, cricket, except by boys under 14, be prohibited in future, and the Green be now allocated for organised games for children and the requirements of the school-teachers be ascertained.”

I was up in arms at once. It seemed a high-handed, unwarrantable and indeed unlawful attempt on the part of the Council to restrict the liberties of the subject. I had always regarded all village greens as common land on which the village were entitled to play any game at any time. I began to make investigations about the Green. I discovered that in old days it was divided by a stream running down the middle of it, that cattle grazed on it and geese wandered at will on it. During the War the War Office requisitioned it, and huts were

erected on it for (I believe) Australian or Canadian troops.

With great difficulty I managed to secure a copy of the By-Laws "for the Regulation and management of the Common situate in the Urban District of Southwick, and known as 'Southwick Green.'" In it I read that by the Commons Act of 1899 a Council are entitled to make by-laws and regulations for the prevention of nuisances and the preservation of order on the Common. Among the by-laws only one could possibly affect us.

It was number thirteen and read :

Games.

(13) Every person resorting to the Common for the purpose of playing or taking part in any game of football, quoits, bowls, hockey, cricket, or any other game which, by reason of the rules or manner of playing, or for the prevention of damage, danger, or discomfort to any person on the Common, may necessitate at any time during the continuance of the game, the exclusive use by the player or players of any space in the Common shall comply with the following regulations :

(Then followed three regulations that could not possibly affect us.) The fourth was :

Ground may be defined.

(4) Where the Council shall have set apart for such game any such portion or portions of the Common as may be defined or described in a notice or notices which shall be affixed or set up in some conspicuous position on the Common, he shall not use for the purpose of playing any such game, any part of the Common which is not comprised in any such portions."

From these by-laws it appeared to me that the Council had no right to deny us the right to play on the Green. I announced publicly that if necessary I was quite prepared to go to prison to assert my right to play cricket

on the Green. The Press immediately scented a big news story, and I found myself even so far afield as New South Wales described as a modern John Hampden.

The Council decided on 1st February not to proceed with the matter until they had received a deputation of the cricket club and the ratepayers' association. In spite, however, of a house to house referendum which produced an 8 to 1 majority in favour of cricket the Council, at their meeting in March, decided by nine votes to one to ban cricket on the Green. Our only supporter was an elderly councillor, W. H. Griffin, who had never played cricket in his life, but denied that there was any real danger to passing traffic from our cricket. On the same day I wrote the following letter to the local press :

" THE HALL,

" SOUTHWICK,

" SUSSEX.

" *8th March, 1932.*

" SIR,

" Against the strongly expressed wishes of the great majority of the electorate the Southwick Councillors have decided to try to ban adult cricket on the village Green.

" Their alleged excuse is that it is dangerous.

" In the last forty years so few spectators or passers-by have been injured by a cricket ball during a match that it requires no great generosity on my part to promise to defray the expenses of anyone who is hurt during my residence here. That I gladly do.

" The real reason for this unhappy and undignified exhibition on the part of our petty tyrants is that they find themselves involved in a huge and unnecessary expense in a recreation ground on which they now seek to compel us to play.

" As patron of the Southwick Cricket Club I would like to state that I propose neither to subscribe to nor to play for the Southwick Cricket Club if it deserts its legitimate home on the Green at the whim of nine men whose blindness to the consequences of their

obstinacy puts them completely out of court as responsible rulers.

"It is required of those in authority that they should speak the truth and take into consideration the wishes of a sober-minded majority.

"As these men have forfeited all our respect I propose to play cricket on Southwick Green whenever I have time and I can find anybody to play with me.

"Yrs.,

"S. P. B. MAIS."

The following week the Cricket Club decided, in spite of the Council's decision, to continue to play, whereupon the President and Chairman resigned, and I was elected President. The local Press began first to hedge and then to side with the Council as being the more likely winners in the controversy.

A match was arranged to take place on the first Saturday of the cricket season, and a great crowd assembled to see us arrested. The green-keeper, attended by the local policeman, solemnly took down all our names and addresses, and that done, we proceeded with the game.

I had discovered that thirty years previously the Council had acquired the Green for £25. I offered them £500 for it and promised that I would turn it over to the Cricket Club as trustees to preserve its accessibility to all people at all times. My offer was ignored.

We made a great mistake in not continuing to play every Saturday. Our legal advisers told us not to play again until our case had been heard in Court. So we waited patiently for the summonses to be issued and the case heard. I had by that time got hold of Sir Laurence Chubb and leading counsel and was prepared to fight the case through the House of Lords, if need be. But the Council, with a quite uncharacteristic astuteness, never brought the case to Court. They relied on stalemate.

We had to play all our fixtures away from home, and that severely tested the loyalty of the players.

On the 8th May I wrote the following letter to *The Times*.

CRICKET ON THE GREEN

A SUSSEX GRIEVANCE

To the Editor of *The Times*.

SIR,

The sad sight of a village green on a sunny Saturday afternoon in May as empty of children as the streets of Hamelin after the Pied Piper's departure impels me to solicit your readers' sympathy and advice.

In 1902 the local council bought the Southwick village green for £25. Until this summer games, with due regard to the weather, have been freely permitted. A few weeks ago the cricket club, who have played on a carefully nurtured pitch in the middle of the green for many years, were informed that in future cricket was to be limited to one regulated game only, confined to children under 14. A referendum was taken showing an overwhelming majority in favour of the continuance of cricket on the green. The council ignored it. A protest game was played in order to find out the limits of the council's legal rights in the matter. The council ignored it. I have myself offered to buy the green back again for twenty times what the council gave for it, and to present it to the village for ever on the sole condition that cricket should for ever be permitted on it. The council ignored my offer. It is hoped that a more amenable council will rescind the present council's decision, as the ban on cricket was only carried by the chairman's casting vote—but what I am concerned about is the summer of 1932.

This village lies in a very congested area, and that the demand for public playgrounds and cricket pitches in this neighbourhood far exceeds the supply is proved by the fact that our own new recreation ground, acquired and laid out at a colossal cost, already resembles a town park on Saturdays. If the village green, for so many years the focus of our communal life, is now to be compelled to stand swept, garnished

and derelict to satisfy the whim of those who object to seeing children at liberty to play as they like, it means the death-knell of the place. No sportsman, no parent, and no lover of liberty who can possibly help it will continue to live in a place where such restrictions are enforced. I suggest that the Playing Fields Association make it their business to find out why two glorious cricket pitches are to lie unused (except by stray dogs) throughout the whole of this summer in an area where hundreds of keen adult cricketers and thousands of children cannot find grounds to play on.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

S. P. B. MAIS.

THE HALL, SOUTHWICK, SUSSEX.

May 8.

On the 19th May I was invited to become President of the Ratepayers' Association. At the Annual Meeting I announced that so far from becoming their President I was in future not going to pay rates to such a Council. I would leave the village rather than live under a tyrannical council.

At the Council meeting in June our doughty champion, Mr. Griffin, pleaded with his fellow-councillors not to proceed to prosecution. His amendment was lost by seven votes to four.

On the 10th of June I had occasion to write once more to the Press.

IS THIS CRICKET?

To the Editor, *Brighton and Hove Herald*.

SIR,

A London visitor was turned off Southwick Green last evening for playing with his child of nine with a soft ball.

Is it contended that this was cricket?

Is it contended that this was dangerous?

Was it done to encourage parents to bring their families here for the summer?

Those who hate children and the sight of their fellow-men ought to come to Southwick in large numbers—for they may now sit on the railings and look out on a green that is quite innocent of all life except a stray bird and an occasional dog.

. A cemetery is far more cheerful.

S. P. B. MAIS.

THE HALL, SOUTHWICK.

Meanwhile letters of sympathy kept on pouring in from all parts of the country, and indeed all parts of the world, even as far away as Auckland, New Zealand.

In May of the following year we won our case, not by going to law, but by the clever expedient of electing a new council, who rescinded the veto of the previous year by seven votes to three; a tremendous triumph for Mr. Griffin, who had never stopped fighting on our behalf.

So now all is well, and we continue to play freely as we have always played on the village green.

The only person who seems to have suffered is myself, for having gone into voluntary exile and given up my house in Southwick I cannot now get back.

I am president of the cricket club, which involves me in more expense than I can afford, and I play for the club, but I no longer live in or pay rates to the village.

Our annual dinners attract the most lively personalities, for in spite of Bernard Shaw's refusal to attend: "I loathe cricket and if you want a village come to mine," nearly all our other invited guests have delighted to honour us. A. A. Milne wrote special verses for us, Dr. Thomas Wood sang "The Swazi Warriors" to us, the Western Brothers gave us twenty minutes of their best, Pat McCormick was mistaken for John, E. V. Lucas remembered his birthplace, Christopher Stone has been characteristically urbane, H. V. Morton typically gentle, Howard Marshall amusing, and Wendy Hiller mistook us for Southwark critics. We now play the B.B.C., the Civil Service, and Sussex Club and Ground, so we feel justified of our stand for freedom.

Chapter XVII

I DINE AT HOME, 1937

“YOU'RE not going to London to-day, Daddy?”
Lalage watches me put on my gaiters with satisfaction. That means that I may ride while she is in school, but that I shall be able to take her for a walk or in the basket in front of my handlebars sometime during the day.

“No, I'm not going to London to-day.”

“I thought not. You aren't putting on your black shoes.” Observant child. She forgets me and breaks into a strange dance-step with the concentrated fury of a physical training instructress.

“James, John, James,” she sings, and faltering, stops. “A hobbily dicciful gallosp,” she says breathlessly. I am a firm believer in retarded development, but I believe that at six years old I got nearer to the English tongue than that.

“I'm going down to the study to finish my letter,” she says, and leaves me to shave. Love Lalage as I do, I like being left alone to shave.

I have now risen to the luxury of my own bathroom, and it is during the precious moments of shaving that I count on being absolutely alone, not because I am afraid of cutting myself, but because it is only then that inspiration comes fresh and pure to me. It is while I shave that I invent the *mots juste* for my after-dinner speeches, and think out fresh points for articles that wait downstairs to be written.

I read my letters and newspapers in bed before I get up. I am down in the study by nine o'clock, the study that I have at last secured as the room of complete privacy, where I may work or rest undisturbed by anybody.

Lalage has her day-nursery, and in it there is a most

fascinating roll-top desk fitted with every conceivable gadget that a child could want. The only thing wrong with it is that she doesn't use it. She uses my own William and Mary bureau that stands in the window of my study.

So I come down at nine o'clock prepared to get my letters finished quickly before settling down to my day's work.

"I done a mistook," says Lalage from the depths of her (or rather my) desk. I have forgotten her presence. The study is a long room, full of desks, tables, benches, books and papers. It is easy to overlook a six-year-old child.

"Bring it here."

She brings to my little dark oak table an envelope well covered with red ink and a piece of notepaper more than sprinkled with green ink.

"I want to tell my grandfather I done a mistook."

I carefully write at her dictation in block capitals :
" I DONE A MISTOOK."

I wonder as I look at her fingers and more apprehensively at my rather valuable desk whether my educational theory of complete liberty is really practicable. She desired to write in ink because I do, so I raised no objections.

I settle down to cope with my correspondence. Could I recommend a farm-house in Suffolk on the sea within ten miles of a town where a young couple could go for their honeymoon, not more than fifteen shillings a week each ?

Would I find out whether the family of Cassilis mentioned in my broadcast talk some five years ago still live in Alnmouth, and if so what is their address ?

Will I allow my name to be included among the committee for the organisation of the Charity Ball for Hornsey Hop-pickers ? Could I give any information about the origin of dew-ponds ? An anonymous post card—a widow's curse. Thank heaven that needs no answer. An appeal for help from a schoolmaster absolutely on the rocks. An invitation to speak without fee to the Women's Institute at Haverford East. A suggestion from a filming agent that I might be interested in the

filming rights of my novels. A long letter from a Mr. Scotland on the subject of horses. A request for an autographed copy of any book for a bazaar to help a church rid itself of death-watch beetle. A bulb catalogue, two second-hand booksellers' catalogues, which I certainly hope to dally over during the morning. A letter from a seventeen-year-old girl typist asking for the loan of a sovereign so that she may go off on her own for a walking-tour at Easter.

Here is one from Mrs. Moyra Meistersinger, Merry Musical Mimic :

"Thanks so much for the P.O. talk. I was glad to hear you tell folk to stamp at corner.

In America on all P.O. counters are the words 'Have you written your address on the envelope?' Surely we might adopt this and save the Dead Letter Office so much work.

Yours,

MOYRA MEISTERSINGER."

Here's one from Kirkcaldy :

"May I call your attention to p. 248 of *A Chronicle of English Literature*. Was it not Sohrab the son who was dying, and not the father as you say.

Yours,

J. O. McDONNELL."

There are three letters describing in detail the writers' personal experiences walking in the Cotswolds in 1877, bicycling in Yorkshire in 1902, and motoring in Wiltshire in 1937, asking no questions, requiring no answers.

Four bills, a receipt, two lots of proofs.

I begin to sift those which have to be answered at once and then put them aside to deal with the most trivial first. Do I know of any farm in Suffolk? I look for a map. Lalage is standing by my side, proudly displaying an envelope on which she had written :

I DO
NE A MIST
OOK.

"You needn't have taken three lines over that," I said.

"You do," she replied, and pointed to one of the envelopes that I had addressed.

I do not feel called upon to explain the intricate differences between envelopes and notepaper. Luckily her nurse at this juncture comes to collect her for school.

I settle down to find a farm in Suffolk. I turn over the pages of the book catalogue. A first edition of *Villette* in original boards with half-title at five guineas surely is very cheap. Why are half-titles so important? Why are they so often missing? I must make a note of this for my speech to the Antiquarian Booksellers. Shall I telegraph for it? I remember how I missed getting that first edition of *Paradise Lost* for three guineas because I wrote instead of sending a telegram. I write out the cheque. No, I can't afford it.

Those bulbs look lovely. Are bulbs more worth while than books? I look out of the window. Our garden is quite new. Our house, Toad Hall, is quite new. The roses look very happy. I brought each one of them back from the nursery on my bicycle, and those young trees have borne their transplanting better than I thought they would. I dug them up on the Downs, angrily, at Jill's behest.

"It'll be soon time to cut the grass. There's your exercise for you," says Jill. How I loathe cutting the grass. I might roll it later on. The lawn is exactly the length of a cricket pitch. But it's too bumpy to practise on.

That was a good idea of Jill's to make a wide circular brick and stone flagged path all round for Lalage to ride her tricycle round and round. A good idea, but it cost me £28. I could have bought a lot of first editions for that, bought them, and then locked them away in my First Editions bookcase.

I'm glad I bought that Derbyshire marble sun-dial and bird-bath. It saves my cutting this end of the lawn, and it's fun watching the wagtails perched on the rim. And my old galleon weather-vane veers uncertainly round with the wind from south to south-west, and back

again. A lot of rain about. I probably shan't ride to-day. But looking out of the window "won't help the old lady to buy a new bonnet."

I finish my letters. I get back at last to my work. Ten o'clock. At ten-thirty exactly in comes Jill, Imogen in her arms, on her way to her morning sleep in the summer-house. She needn't of course come this way, but the daily progress of gain in weight and appetite has to be reported. Stunned by the sight of so many books and her father, the loquacious, crowing, laughing Imogen becomes quite silent and fixes me with her huge black-blue eyes. She turns her neck suddenly, jerkily, to my mind dangerously, yanking her body with convulsive kicks to see this and that. Eventually she goes on her way to the summer-house. I try to settle down.

Half an hour later a head appears in the doorway. Jill again. "I'm just going down to the shops. Is there anything you want?"

"Nothing," I bawl, "nothing in the world except to be left alone for ever and ever and ever." And she goes, and no sooner has she gone than I dash out after her, letters in hand.

"You've forgotten the letters," I scream at her retiring figure. "I want some glue, and paper-clips, and three five-shilling books of stamps, and some more razor-blades."

It's no good. She either doesn't hear or won't hear. She's gone.

"And what about that toast-nut chester?" I bellow. I always get my words tied up when I'm baffled or angry.

I go back to work.

I look up to see Alice's head peering round the door. "Please, sir, Mr. Miller's come with the chicken, and it'll be seven shillings. No, sir, the mistress is out."

I hand over a ten-shilling note with violence. Alice reappears to say that Mr. Miller has no change, and he'll call again next week. I go back to work.

The telephone-bell rings. I keep the telephone in my study, of course, but not on my desk. It stands far away in the window, a splash of scarlet to match my step-

ladder, on an ancient black oak Bible-box. To reach it I have to leap over a monks' bench, and dodge tables full of newspapers, more desks, and heaps of piled-up books. It is a girl's voice.

"Can I speak to Jill, please?"

Very loudly, very rudely, I shout: "She's out."

"Is she bringing Lalage over to tea to-day?"

"I'll ask her when she comes in."

I slam the receiver down, jump over the obstacles to regain my desk and my interrupted thoughts.

The telephone-bell rings again.

"Is that Shoreham-by-Sea 312?"

"It is."

"Please hold on."

I hold on for ever and ever. At long last there comes a man's voice.

"Mr. Mais?"

Wearily I assent that it is. Then I wake up and glow.

"This is the R.K.O. Advertising Services. We want to know whether you would be interested in doing a series of broadcast talks on bicycling on the South Coast for our clients?"

Would I be interested? I spend the next five minutes adumbrating a scheme, and then promise to submit the first talk before night.

I replace the receiver, rush back to my desk, put aside the work I'm doing, and concentrate on this new commission, forgetting that it isn't a commission, and that when I have submitted my scheme it is long odds against my ever hearing from R.K.O. again. When people write they often mean business. When they telephone they often don't.

Suddenly I feel an arm on my shoulder. I look up in a fury. Am I never to have a moment to myself? It is Jill leaning over me as I write.

"Do you realise," she is saying, "that in all this time you've said nothing about me? Do I count for nothing in your life?"

To be asked in the very middle of the morning whether your very heart's blood counts for nothing in your life is

inclined to make a man feel homicidal. I turn round like a disturbed adder.

"Didn't we build this house so that you should have all the peace and privacy of your own drawing-room and I should have all the peace and privacy of my own study? And here you come running in and out every minute of the day with some damfool question like 'Do I count for nothing in your life?' Don't you realise that you've now made me lose the whole trend of my thought, and that all my morning's work is completely ruined? I can't go on working with all these interruptions."

Jill knows the length of my furies and their worth.

"Ah, well," she says, when I have exhausted my flow of rhetoric. "It may be no great matter. I've been reading the earlier chapters of your autobiography. After all you asked me to. Don't you want criticism?"

I want to say "Not now." But it wouldn't be any good. I resign myself. She goes on:

"You've got the title of the book wrong. This isn't *all* the days of your life. This is *some* of the days of your *working* life. What about me? What about Imogen and Lalage? Aren't you going to say anything about us? Don't we count for anything in your life?"

"Don't go on singing that anthem. Why should I say anything about you? My working life is all my life so far as the reading public is concerned. My private life is my own affair."

"I don't think so. If anybody reads you as far as this they'll say, 'What's it all for? What was his aim in life? Hadn't he a philosophy of life?'"

"Oh! I've got a philosophy of life all right, but cheerfulness, like you and the telephone, keeps on breaking in. By the way, Iris rang up to——"

"That can wait. Do you know what your epitaph will be?"

"No, what?"

"'Here lies a man who found no time to live.'"

"I'm going to be cremated."

"That is not going to prevent you from having a epitaph."

"You're jealous of my work."

"You treat us both in the same way, passionately devoted one minute and trying to get away from us the next."

"No."

"No, not quite. It's harder to get you to leave your work. I wish you'd learn to relax, let up a bit sometimes."

"You make me sound as if I were the beetle in the *Insect Play*. 'My pile—my pile.'"

"That's just the trouble, you wear yourself out rushing about collecting for your pile, but it grows no bigger. It dwindles. Have we ever been worse off?"

"There are a few outstanding bills." I cover up the cheque for *Villette*. "I can't keep money."

"But you love earning it."

"And spending it."

"You're not extravagant."

"Careless. I paid half a guinea for a pair of nail-scissors yesterday."

"You did what?"

I produce them from my pocket, rather shamefacedly. I begin to prepare a defence.

"They're stainless. They——"

"You don't have to excuse yourself. It's your money."

"And I bought some of that Tokay you like, and a couple of pounds of pecans, and then of course some more of those bottled whortleberries from Fortnum. After all we only live once."

"Your philosophy's breaking through in spite of your cheerfulness."

"You do love interrupting me, don't you?"

"I get so lonely sometimes I could scream."

"Lonely, with Lalage and Imogen?"

"Why does every man think that he has only to give a woman two children for all her immortal longings to be consummated in looking after them?"

"You adore them."

"So do you, but you don't let them hang round your neck all day. When you go up to London I simply wander about in a semi-dither."

"You don't read enough."

"Books!" she says, witheringly. "I don't want to escape from life. I want to live it. Don't you ever get in a panic at the rate that life is slipping past?"

"Often. That's why I write so fast; to get things said while I can."

"Instead of going out and doing fresh things, seeing fresh places, meeting fresh people."

"You ought to have married Mr. Scrope."

"Who was he?"

I hand her a cutting from the *Evening Standard*.

"Read it to me."

"Mr. Scrope," I read, "went to the Union Club every day for nearly twenty years. He used to arrive there by car at twelve-thirty. He would go into the smoking-room and then to luncheon. After coffee, he would go to the card-room and play bridge until 7 p.m., when his car would come to fetch him home. That was his routine. He never varied it."

"The man with the buried talent. No wonder God was annoyed. He didn't give us all these frantic wishes and grand qualities to fust in us unused."

I put my pen down.

"My most frantic wish just at this moment is to get out into the open air. I can't work any more. Let's go out."

Jill laughs merrily.

"How you love me to come in and interrupt you, so that you can lay the blame on me for not being able to go on working." I look out of the window so that she shall not see that she has succeeded in making me laugh. I hate being made to laugh when I'm trying to lose my temper. Jill knows me too well.

"The sun's just coming out," I say. "The man's a fool who stays indoors when the sun shines, however urgent his work. Collect Dragon."

Dragon is a Welsh corgi whose passion for exercise is as little controlled as our own. He is at this moment careering madly round the lawn and over the flower-beds making havoc of Jill's freshly-budding crocuses.

While Jill chases Dragon I get up and wander round the study fingering my treasures, opening the Johnson dictionary on the round cricket table, taking out the secret drawers of my bureau to see if the golden coins are still there, wheeling my yellow toy caravan and grey horse over the polished surface of the oak floor, whirling my corn bushel measure that does duty for a waste-paper basket round and round, picking up and putting down the glistening marbles on my solitaire board, unlocking the glass-covered bookcase that holds my first editions, looking at my Brockhurst etchings. "Look thy last on all things lovely every hour." That is certainly part of my philosophy.

It takes Jill a long time to catch that dog. He likes this game. In the end, tired of turning over and looking at my much-loved possessions, I shout at her, knowing it will annoy her: "You'll find me in the coach-house."

She hates to hear me call it the coach-house, but it is at least as accurate a name as garage, for it holds neither coach nor car, but is a receptacle for all our wines, luges, gardening-tools, hose, logs, and bicycles. Eventually Dragon is captured and hoisted into the basket on the front of Jill's bicycle.

There usually follows a slight argument about direction. In the summer we naturally go to the beach, but for the greater part of the year we either go straight up over the Downs or over the wooden toll-bridge that spans the Adur and leads to the airport and the river-bank where the oyster-catchers and cormorants gather; or we wander over the one wet field where the plover concentrate and climb the Downs above Lancing. Sometimes we contrive to visit the little antique shop from which we have practically furnished our new home.

We don't talk while we're cycling. The motorists see to that. But when we have pushed the bicycles into the haystack above Lancing and let Dragon go we can again let loose our pent-up thoughts.

"I still think you'll have to put in a chapter about us," says Jill as we start to climb the hill.

"Do we count for nothing in your life?" I quote.

"Well?"

"You know jolly well that you count for so much that every time you go down to the shops on the bike, or Lalage goes out with Nanny I get in a panic lest you should have an accident. You know jolly well that you are my sun, moon and stars, and that without you my whole existence would be meaningless. You like to hear me say it, don't you?"

"I love to hear you say it, but if that's so why don't you bring us into your book?"

"Because I can't. What is there to say? That we have the loveliest quarrels, and that they don't mean a thing. You wouldn't expect readers to appreciate what you and I feel on seeing Imogen break into a smile at our approach. To other people Lalage is just a six-year-old small girl with fair hair and blue eyes."

"And what about me?"

"Just a honey-coloured rather virginal-looking young mother of two daughters. Hark! There's a lark."

"You always change the subject when you can't answer anything."

"What can't I answer? You were asking me whether I'd got a formulated philosophy of life. You ought to know as you live with me. You have to suffer the whole brunt of my personality."

"Brunt is the right word. But I can't claim to know you just because I live with you. Everybody's heart is a dark forest and yours is darker than most. You don't invite confidences. You're very secretive."

"You mean that I don't sing like the lark. I do when I'm free as he is; it's only when I'm at work that I've got to keep myself to myself."

"You never tell me anything of your money affairs."

"Money's to spend, not to worry about."

"Or what you think about this and that."

"What, for instance?"

"Religion."

"Religion is what a man does with his loneliness. It isn't a thing that you can discuss in public with much profit. I don't belong to the Oxford Group."

"No—you say your prayers in secret."

"I've scriptural warrant for that."

"You've got rather a passion for loneliness."

"I don't think so. All only children have to cultivate the habit of being by themselves. I don't like mobs. They lead to lynchings. But I'd far rather listen to that lark in your company than alone. I'd far rather walk over the Downs with you than alone, even if you occasionally get a little fractious, as becomes a housewife. It distracts me from my thoughts, but it helps you."

"How?"

"Well, merely to air your troubles about Alice breaking things and not sweeping under the rug helps you. Otherwise you'd brood over trivialities and magnify them into things of importance."

"But running a house is important."

"Not letting the house run you is much more important. This breaking of good dinner services and wine-glasses, for instance. You know how you let that get you down."

"I certainly do."

"And how you went on deducting breakage costs from Alice's wages, until she had scarcely anything coming to her, and how instead of curing her it made her worse."

"It certainly did."

"Well, have you noticed how much less has been broken this last week or two?"

"Yes, but I didn't think that you had."

"Listen. You were out at dancing-class with Lalage. I was in my bath, just home from hunting, and I heard the most awful sobs coming from the kitchen. I jumped out, half dried myself, threw on some clothes, and found Alice with half a dish in her hand almost in hysterics. I couldn't get her to stop. I said: 'Rather than see you do this I'll break every plate in the house and eat off rubber. What's the matter?' It took a long time. She didn't know how she was going to pay for it. She was thirty bob in debt, permanent wave or something equally silly."

"So you pushed the thirty bob in her hand, told her not to worry and break as much as she likes. I know you."

"Well. It worked. Now that she's no longer nervous of breaking things she breaks nothing. Servants get a pretty poor deal. They're always cleaning up for other people after other people, and imprisoned in the kitchen when their work's over with nothing but letters to write, a bit of knitting and *Woman and Beauty*, and eating their heart out for a sight of their boy as he goes by, and their next half-day."

"But they skimp their work so."

"So would you if you had to send twelve-and-six a week home to your mother out of a quid. The trouble is that servants care too little and we care too much for our home."

"Too much? You can't care too much for a home."

"You certainly can. There's the danger of getting one's roots so firmly planted in one place that transplanting kills one."

"You don't want to be for ever moving."

"No, but you want to preserve very jealously your adaptability, your capacity to move on either with your caravan or without it."

"There's a danger in that. You wouldn't take any trouble to surround yourself with all the lovely things you want if there was always a likelihood of moving."

"You can take trouble with temporary things. You take trouble over your face even though some day it'll be all wrinkles. You can take trouble over Toad Hall even if it's not ours."

"You'd hate to own a house, wouldn't you?"

"I think it's a white elephant."

"And yet you love Toad Hall."

"It's got our character."

"Only so long as we live in it."

"That's long enough for us. Other men, other manners."

"But Lalage and Imogen?"

"They'll marry, build their own houses, develop their

own characters. Surely you don't want them to grow up into replicas of us."

"Of course not, but they'll be poorer if they don't stop to listen to the lark, and see no fun in walking over the Downs."

"And digging up trees."

"And filling their pockets with flints."

"They're all right."

"Whether they are or not it's no good worrying. 'For no man may redeem his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him, for it cost more to redeem their souls, and he must leave that alone for ever.' A cruel doctrine. It only emphasises the fact that in the end everybody is lonely, and I don't want to be lonely. I can't somehow compensate for the absence of people by the presence of things as you can."

"Things?"

"Sunsets, high-banked clouds, the lengthening evenings of early spring, periwinkles and celandines in the hedges, ducks squiggling in the mud. I want to share them with you. If you're not there they're not there. I hate being so dependent."

"But when I'm not here, the Seven Sisters still are, and Steep Down and Chanctonbury Ring. There's some quality about the Downs that smooths one out just as they are smooth, even if one's alone."

"Yes, I know. I feel it faintly. Trouble and fancies do fall away up here, but they come back when I go down to the valley again."

"You should stay out all day."

"With a small baby to feed every four hours? It's all right for you. You can take your boiled eggs out and not come back till midnight. But I'm chained. I've got to go back now. Don't you want to go on?"

I looked wistfully at Chanctonbury. Life is one continual turning back with Pisgah in full view.

"Of course I do. But I'm not going on. I'm coming back with you."

"And you'll grumble all the rest of the day at me because you haven't had enough exercise."

"I'm sure to."

"And go to sleep after lunch and wake up with a headache."

"Which I shall deserve for going to sleep at that time."

"You'd much better stay out. It's much better for you."

"I know. It's much better for me. But I'm coming back with you."

"Why?"

"I've no idea. Contrariety, perhaps. I'm not so fond of my own society since I met you. This dread of being by oneself is catching."

"You're coming back for my sake. I'd rather you didn't."

"For my own. I'd rather I did. In an unstable world the more we do things together the less we shall have reason to lament if anything happens to separate us."

"Isn't that just what you said we ought not to do? Digging in one's roots so deep so that we can't transplant without dying."

"With people dig as deep as you can go. It's only places that you should treat lightly."

"But suppose your roots are not so deep as mine. What happens then?"

"You've got to believe that they are."

"It's not always easy."

We talk less on the way home.

It is pleasant to know people so well that you don't have to talk at all.

"I suppose we get on as well as most people," says Jill, suddenly.

"Better than most, I believe."

"How?"

"Not so dull. We don't have to play games to amuse each other. We never know what's round the corner. We don't live to a schedule."

"I'm glad you don't have to go up to Town every day any longer."

"That's a great destroyer of domestic happiness."

The amount of good energy and good temper destroyed in catching trains every day would be enough to found a pretty sizeable Utopia."

As we turn the corner by the spinney that faces Toad Hall Lalage comes running down the garden-path crying: "Do you know what's for dinner?"

"It is an ugly house," I say. "It's just like a toad." Jill, pretending not to hear, takes Lalage to inspect the rock pool and see if there are any signs of the water lily.

All my life I swore that I would live in an old house of warm Cotswold stone in Gloucestershire. Toad Hall is brand-new, of red brick, and in Sussex. I love it. That is the sort of compromise one makes with one's ideal. But Jill has two fears, ghosts and spiders, both of whom seem to prefer old houses. And certainly Sussex gets more sun than Gloucestershire. And it is on an electrified railway system which brings London and lectures practically to my doorstep.

"If we lived in Gloucestershire you'd never get home at night, and that I couldn't bear."

"Do you know what's for dinner?" repeats Lalage.

It is quicker to answer Lalage's questions at once. No one knows the value of importunity so well as a child.

"Steak and kidney?"

"No."

"Rabbit?"

"No."

"What?"

"Sausages. I like sausages."

Not, however, to judge from the dainty way she picks at hers with a fork in her right hand and spoon in her left, so much as I do.

"You've got to eat every scrap of it up," says Jill. I am not sure that she's right. I like immensely Samuel Butler's theory that no child should be taught anything until it goes down on its knees and begs to be taught.

I would employ the same practice in eating. If a child doesn't want to eat I see no reason why it should.

Its appetite is much the same as mine. Forcible feeding, if ever defensible, which I doubt, is a prison measure.

The dining-room at Toad Hall is a pleasant light room with seventeenth-century maps on the walls, a walnut corn-bin as a sideboard, a number of side-tables for decanters, syphons, bottles, fruit, tomato-juice and other cocktails, and a carving table. The chairs are wheel-backed, the floor a highly polished oak like the table whose main ornament is a massive pair of silver candlesticks which come into their own at night.

At two o'clock Lalage goes upstairs to rest, and I to my study to work. Instead of sleeping she works with her paints. Instead of working I sleep. That is the one disadvantage of having one's dinner in the middle of the day. But that we do for Lalage's sake. "Oh, early every afternoon (as Ogden Nash sings) I like a temporary swoon."

Before the drowsy numbness overtakes my senses I usually manage to dip into the *New Yorker*, *Tatler*, or if there is a new novel about, I get perhaps a chapter of that read before I succumb. I don't usually wake till three o'clock, and then it is time to take Lalage for her afternoon walk.

This usually means an excursion to the farm to feed the ducks, or into the Park to swing, or up over the Downs. Conversation is seldom continuous because most of the time is spent hiding or seeking. There is a good deal of hallooing of school companions. It doesn't seem very exciting or interesting while we are out, but I get sudden pangs when I am far away, and a wild desire to see that little figure in the dark blue reefer coat come running down the chalk lane smiling. She is a strange mixture of the elfish and the old-fashioned.

Tea is a drawing-room meal. That means that I dash in for a cup of tea and go straight back to my study with a sandwich of whortleberry jam or honey and go on working.

By this time the sun is shining through the French windows straight on to my work-table. On my main desk lie the files of other work mutely remonstrant, galleys of proofs waiting to be corrected, trays of letters

(not immediate), a pile of new books waiting to be read. . . . But I've got to get this specimen talk on the joys of cycling right before post-time, so I go back to my little black oak table, cover it with maps of Southern England, and begin to work out a scheme.

At 5.15 I turn on the wireless for the dance band which does not prevent me from concentrating on my work. At 6 o'clock I turn it off because I can't work while the news is being broadcast. Imogen is brought in for final approval before going up to bed. At 6.45 I go upstairs with a one-inch ordnance map of North Devon to go through my nightly ritual with Lalage.

"There's 'Oocacombe," she says and points with exact finger to Woolacombe, to her as it is to me, an Earthly Paradise.

I spent my early childhood on those golden sands, and she too is amassing year by year more and more golden memories of them. I am a great believer in always visiting fresh places and not trying to recapture a perfection of the past. It argues a very dull mind to revisit for fifty consecutive years the same seaside resort, and of all vain things the attempt to live over again a finished romance is the vainest. But Woolacombe is the exception. I loved it as a boy. I dreamt of it in early manhood, and now I love it more than ever, partly for the increased happiness it gives me, and more for the joy of seeing my own children roll down its sand-hills, scramble over its rocks, fly kites in the high wind, gallop on the donkeys, trot on the ponies, surf-ride over the breakers, sing hymns with the C.S.S.M., pick veronica and fuchsia from the hedges, picnic in the marram grass, build castles against the incoming tide, and gorge themselves full of the yellow clotted cream. I like Lalage to go to sleep every night with thoughts of Woolacombe uppermost in her mind.

At 7.30 we sup, to me almost as brief a meal as tea. It is usually as silent as it is brief. I am still in the throes of my work, wondering whether I shall get it off by the last post which leaves at 9.30. I dislike heavy meals at home at night.

If Jill had her way she would be going to the pictures. But she won't go without me, and I won't go unless I can be more or less sure that one of the two main features has passed the bar of the judgment of Miss Le Jeune or Alistair Cooke.

Jill and I differ fundamentally on pictures, but as she goes less often than she wishes I defer to her in this. She judges her money's worth by the time spent in the cinema. If she sees the whole programme round she feels that she has had her money's worth. If the film comes up to the expectation roused in me by Miss Le Jeune I am well content. If it is succeeded or preceded by a "dud" all the benefit done me by the good film is undone. I get a severe headache, I feel emptied of all energy and virtue, and quite often I feel slightly sick.

I dislike cinema audiences. As they invariably talk loudly and therefore obviously neither look nor listen I cannot understand why enterprising entertainment purveyors do not build warm dark palaces with a continual organ playing softly where lovers may be at peace and the loquacious can let their tongues wag.

But so contrary is the mob that I feel that the scheme wouldn't work. The cinema-goers only talk because they know it teases, just as they cough and light cigarettes just at the moment when the tension on the screen is at its height.

I would pay money not to spend three hours in a picture house, but money is well spent in seeing *The Thin Man*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Dodsworth*, and certain French and German films that take just about an hour. An hour is quite as much as ordinary eyes can bear without pain.

On the other hand I find most modern theatrical plays too short. I can well endure two and a half hours in the theatre when the play is by O'Casey or Synge. Alas, how few dramatists have the capacity of these two Irishmen to make their characters come alive on the stage.

Generally speaking I would far rather spend the evening in my own study listening to radio plays, not

because radio plays can compare with stage plays, but because of the discomfort of getting to the theatre, the discomfort of the seats, the behaviour of the audiences, and the lateness of getting home. If I had my way I should always go to bed at ten o'clock. I see no point in sitting up o' nights playing bridge, and I get far too sleepy to work after ten o'clock.

When Henry Williamson comes over on summer nights to Woolacombe to read over the chapters of his new book, entranced as I always am by his style and story, I invariably fall asleep after half an hour. I apparently need more sleep than the normal man, for I can go to sleep in trains at any hour of the day. The only place I can't sleep is on the sea.

But if I deny Jill the luxury of going out at night it does not follow that my excuse of work holds good, because she knows as well as I do that if there is an attractive talk on the radio I shall listen. If there is a Music-hall Hour I shall listen. If there is dance music I shall turn it on, but then I shall still be able to work.

At nine o'clock I listen to the news. There follows a moment or so of depression about the state of "chassis" of the modern world. I feel that wireless is not an altogether unmixed blessing, and that it might have been better for our national peace of mind if we were living in the England of Jane Austen which did not allow its parochial placidity to be disturbed by the bellowings of Buonoparte.

Just as in the early morning I find five minutes long enough in which to glean the news from the newspaper, so at night I find that five minutes is as much as I can bear either of the announcer's voice or what he has to announce. And about half-past nine Jill will look up from her sea of *Tatlers*, *Sketches*, *Bystanders*, *Vogues* and the rest and say: "It's time you had a rest." And I'll look across the room to that much-loved head and I shan't be able to resist the temptation.

"You mean your eyes are tired," I say.

"I mean that I want to sit on the floor and put my head in your lap."

I turn off the lights, put another log on the fire, cross the room to the one long, low easy chair in the room, and settle down with Jill's head in my lap.

"There are not many lovelier things in life than flame," says Jill. "It's queer that lovely things should be so dangerous; water, fire."

"And women taking one away from one's work."

"Suppose I wasn't here. Would you be happier? Would you be able to work any better? What would you be doing?"

"I should not be happier. I should not be able to work any better, that is I shouldn't be working any more than I am now, and what I should be doing would be eating my heart out, wondering what you were doing."

"Just as I do when you're away."

"It's queer that a person's bodily presence, even when you find its mannerisms irritating, and rousing you to violent sudden anger, can be so all-important as to make life go on or altogether stop."

"It's one of the queer things not to be accounted for in your philosophy."

"Which goes to prove that I have no philosophy. But I've got enough for one thing anyway."

"And that is."

"When I come to die I shall be able to say, as Hazlitt said, and with far more reason: 'I have had a happy life.'" Jill yawns.

"It's time for bed."

"I love my bed."

"You needn't tell me. Your snoring proves it every night."

"I don't snore."

Jill laughs. "I can even forgive that for the sake of your presence."

"So it all comes back to the same thing in the end. Sleeping or waking life is very good—with you."

"I'm tired of philosophy. It's my turn for first bath."

"I'll be seeing you."

"Thank God."

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